



Essays on the **FRENCH REVOLUTION**

By

Duclos	Bruhat
Peri	Fajon
Solomon	Bouthonnier
Prenant	Politzer
	Billiet



TEN ESSAYS ON THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

*Translated by WILLIAM ZAK from
Cahiers àue Communisme 1939*

*Edited and with an Introduction by
T. A. JACKSON*

THE BOOKMAN
CALCUTTA

First published in England by
Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., London . . . 1945
First Indian Edition 1946



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Published by Chinmohan Sehanavis, from the Bookman,
63, Dharmatala Street, Calcutta and printed by
Panckori Mukherji, from Printkraft, 63, Dharmatala
Street, Calcutta.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

By T. A. JACKSON

France! From its grey dejection
 Make manifest the red
Tempestuous resurrection
 Of thy most sacred head!—
Rend thou the covering cerecloths:—
 Rise up from the dead!

SWINBURNE.

THE essays which make up the body of this book were all written to commemorate the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak in 1789 of the Great French Revolution.

The authors were all of them distinguished scholars and all were outstanding members of the Communist Party of France. That we should have to write "were" does not mean that any of them have flinched or fallen away. It means only that three of them at least—Gabriel Peri, Jacques Solomon, and Georges Politzer—have been murdered by the Nazi Fascists, and that others of them may, by now, also have died for the "crime" of resisting, and encouraging others to resist, the enslavement of their country.

Some of them were, we know, prisoners; the rest are, we hope, now at large. All of them wherever they are, have remained steadfast to the faith they expound with so much learning, clarity, and revolutionary conviction in the essays translated herein.

For them, the authors, this book was something more than the commemoration of a mighty occasion. It was a challenging and stimulating declaration of their faith in the inevitable triumph of Humanity.

For us, editors and publishers, it is all that and more still.

It is a tribute to our French Comrades, men of magnificent courage, and to their heroic resistance to the Nazi-Fascist enemies of mankind.

Through them it is a salute to a great and gallant nation, an acknowledgement of the immense debt the whole world owes to France. And it is a gesture of welcome in advance to the great day which will see France—militant, victorious, and self-liberated—restored to her rightful place of honour in the vanguard of the onward march of the human race.

It is to be feared that, to the ordinary Briton of today, the salient events and leading personalities of the Great French Revolution have become things half-forgotten, or hardly at all known. Until the Russian Revolution of November, 1917, replaced it in the minds of conservatives and reactionaries as the stock example of the evil that results once the “lower orders” are allowed to “get out of hand,” there was always an incentive to refresh our memories, even if for most Englishmen this meant at most taking another glance at Carlyle’s classic work.

Since the Bolshevik Revolution, however, it has no longer been necessary if one desired to follow intelligently the more fervid speeches of conservatives and reactionaries to know what a “Jacobin” was, and the sort of horrible things the Jacobins were alleged to have done. Carlyle’s work, with its virtues as well as its limitations, has been left to gather dust, or to find its way into the “national effort bin,” and the titanic struggle, the “Baphometic fire-baptism,” which opened on July 14th, 1789, has receded from recollection until for many it has sunk wholly below the horizon.

In these circumstances it can hardly be deemed superfluous if we preface this work first of all with an outline-sketch of the French Revolution.

As contemporary Englishmen saw it, the first remarkable thing about the French Revolution was its total unexpectedness.

For well over a century the Kings of France had been “absolute.” Not even the Pope seemed to sit more securely on his throne than the King of France. The French Court had been an object of universal admiration, envy, emulation (or reprobation, according to taste) a by-word for elaborate ceremonial etiquette, and conventionalised luxury and refinement.

France for a century and more had been the cultural centre and summit of civilization—her wits, her philosophers, her painters, musicians, and luxury-craftsmen seemed unsurpassable, and, all taken together, both a proof of and a reinforcement of the stability of the already unshakable Grand Monarchy and its régime.

The Dutch, the English, the Austrians, and occasionally also the Hanoverians and Prussians, might win victories over the French armies now and then, but, on the whole, there was little in it, one way or the other, when the campaign ended. Indeed, the chief point of such victories as those of Marlborough, or—when he won victories over the French—the King of Prussia lay in the fact that the Grand Monarchy of France seemed so strongly based that it could survive even such defeats as Blenheim without, seemingly, turning a hair. It was, it seemed, so strong that the greatest victory could add next to nothing to its strength and the heaviest defeat give it no more than a barely perceptible tremor.

Then, to the amazement of all but a tiny few with special facilities for knowing, the French monarchy in August, 1788, confessed itself in financial difficulties—and that those were so great that there was nothing for it but to summon a meeting of the *States-General*, which had not been convoked since 1614.

In a sense the summoning of the *States-General* was tantamount to a revolution in itself. In England, the first Stuart kings had tried to do without Parliaments and had made a mess of the attempt. Not a little of the suspicion and anger directed against the Stuarts came from the knowledge that they might succeed as the French kings had done if they were not restricted desperately. That, after all these years, the French king should admit his inability to manage without the French equivalent of the Houses of Parliament was news of an importance so great that it was almost impossible to overestimate. English Whigs and Constitutionalists hoped for the utmost and saw no reason to conceal their delight. English Tories tempered mild satisfaction with misgivings; their French equivalents feared the worst at once.

Yet there was nothing else for it. The State was insolvent. Interest on accumulated debt gobbled up a huge slice of the

revenue; and raising fresh revenue by the established mode left over from the Middle Ages was out of the question. As Jacques Solomon shows in the essay on *Finance*, hereinafter, the fiscal system of the *ancien régime* was both scandalously oppressive and ludicrously wasteful. A new source of taxation had to be found, and, in one way or another this meant that the bourgeoisie, who, despite the cramping limitations of the old order, were growing rich and powerful, would have to "pay the piper." Naturally, they could be relied upon to insist on "calling the tune."

If there had been any sort of revolutionary republican movement in France in 1788, the confession of failure involved in the summoning of the *States-General* would have been tantamount to an abdication. But that is precisely the point—there was no such movement. In those historical circumstances, such a thing was inconceivable. It is doubtful whether there were so many as a dozen speculative républicans in all France, and most of these were members of the cultured aristocracy, sceptical about the *ancien régime*, but interested, personally, in keeping it going as long as possible.

That established the issue: the Monarchy could not manage without the bourgeoisie and the money the bourgeoisie could be induced to part with; the bourgeoisie, even if it had ceased to believe with the ignorant and superstitious, that kings ruled by "right divine," still regarded the Monarchy as irreplaceable. Thus the lines of struggle were set: for the King and the Court on the one side and the bourgeoisie on the other the problem was the same, to get as much as could be got and give in return only so much as they must. The Monarchy needed cash; the bourgeoisie needed reforms; the history of the opening stages of the revolution is a record of their process of bargaining—and of the complications which arose from the fact that there were other people in France as well as the court clique on the one side and the bourgeoisie on the other.

In a way the Monarchy itself complicated the issue by a stroke which seemed highly diplomatic when made. It invited all the non-privileged "Third Estate" (called hereinafter the *Tiers*) that is, everybody not included in the other two "Estates" the clergy and the nobility, to draw up for the information of the King's ministers, and, with a view to redress, a statement of all the grievances they suffered with suggestions

for reform. The discussions in all parts of France preparatory to drawing up these statements of grievances (*Cahiers de Doleances*) constituted in fact an intensive school of political education, which, prolonged for three-quarters of a year, transformed the outlook of everybody in France. They dissipated apathy and awakened hopes, many of them extravagant and fore-doomed to disappointment, many of them just and capable of immediate satisfaction, but all springs of agitation and political effort. Corresponding to the hopes of some were the fears of others. Out of the discussions which gave birth to the *Cahiers de Doleances* began to emerge the political groupings and parties which expressed the truth that when a social system becomes ripe for transformation "men fight out the issue as a 'class' struggle, conscious of their opposing interests."

It is important to remember that the lines of demarcation between the "Estates" which the *ancien régime* had inherited from Mediæval feudalism no longer corresponded to the actual economic and social relations between men in French society. In the Middle Ages, when the overwhelming majority lived outside the towns in direct dependence upon the produce of the soil, it was quite reasonable, for example, to exempt the nobility from cash contributions to the State Exchequer. They had in fact, relatively little cash at command. They drew most of their revenues in kind, and for long could do nothing with these revenues but literally eat them and drink them, and wear them on their backs. They could contribute to the Exchequer in kind—by inviting the King to come and take his fill of the eating and drinking—and could and did supply what in those days money could not buy, the armed forces for the King's wars. The clergy had more money, and in theory paid more; but they could supply what was then indispensable, the Church's blessing and its prayers; and these counted heavily as a set off against the contributions of the lords. The town burghers for their part, had cash in relative plenty, and were glad to pay, in reason, to escape the burden of military service. The towns were, in general, assessed as corporate entities which paid dues to the State, generally out of the town funds—and recovered the money by local arrangements satisfactory to the citizens.

The arrangement was, in Mediæval circumstances, simple and natural; and it worked so well that it was perpetuated from habit, sanctified by age, long after the conditions which gave it birth had changed beyond recognition.

In 1788 real wealth no longer consisted in the lordship of land. The nobility no longer provided, at the head of their vassals, the armed might of the State. They still collected their dues from the peasantry, often in kind. But they no longer ate them and drank them. They sold them to cover part of the cost of living in Paris, pulling wires to obtain a Court appointment or a commission in the Army or Navy. They had become a parasite class, with no social function at all beyond dancing attendance upon the King and Court.

The town burghers had changed too. The incorporated towns were still limited to those which had received official recognition in the Middle Ages. Some had shrunk to nothing; others had grown in fact, but were still officially limited to the areas they occupied at any rate before 1614. It is to a modern, bewildering to find that the Saint Antoine quarter, for example, into which one steps straight out of the very centre of Paris, was in 1789 still officially a "faubourg"—that is, a "suburb." The bourgeoisie and the town population had in fact grown absolutely, but had grown still more relatively in proportion to the population. But since it was domiciled for the greater part "outside" the town limits as these had stood in the Middle Ages, their assessment for taxation was an insoluble riddle. They could not be brought under the taxes originally agreed to by the burghers without straining legal interpretation to the limit. They could not be subjected to rural taxes without arbitrariness promoting endless disputes. In short, the situation was, from the point of view of the Exchequer, quite impossible.

And again; in the Middle Ages the distinction between the nobility, the clergy, and the townspeople had been one of fact and practice. As categories they were then functionally distinct, and within each order conditions were much of a parity. Not so in 1788—9. The rich nobles no longer functioned as feudal *seigneurs*. They were often State functionaries, and often also financiers, speculators, merchant-capitalists, and bourgeois landlords. The poorer nobility were either pro-

fessional soldiers or plain spongers and parasites. Many were glad to get rid of the "nobility that obliges" and secure freedom to take their chance to become good bourgeois through trade or the professions.

A similar cleavage existed among the clergy between the wealthy members of the Church Hierarchy—who were usually connected with the aristocracy—and the poor and hard-working parish priests, who were usually of humble origin.

But the disparity was widest of all in the ranks of the *Tiers*—since this category now included everything from cottagers and farm-labourers to wealthy but untitled financiers. Naturally, the bourgeoisie, and next to them the professional classes, especially the lawyers, took the lead in voicing the demands of the *Tiers*. They were the best equipped for the task, either as the most wealthy and best organized or as the best equipped by training for political advocacy. And, naturally, while the whole *Tiers* was united in a common revolt against the *ancien régime* and a common resentment of the arrogance and exploitation of the parasitic aristocracy, the bourgeoisie and their professional allies earned all the paludits they gained as champions of the common cause.

It is, at the same time, self-evident that once the *ancien régime* had been overthrown, and the privileges of the aristocracy had been abolished, the common tie which bound all discordant elements in the *Tiers* into a revolutionary unity was severed. Thenceforward, financiers and speculators, merchant-capitalists and contractors, industrial-capitalists, artisan-craftsmen and labourers, stock-farmers, vine-growers, smallholders, cultivators, rural labourers, shopkeepers, innkeepers, landlords, and professional men—each and all of them would be faced with an objective necessity to "fight out the issue as a class struggle conscious of their conflicting and opposing interests."

That is the clue to the culminating phases of the revolution, and to its final outcome.

When the Court resolved to summon the *States-General* it presented itself with a problem—the problem of etiquette and procedure. How did a *States-General* do its business?

There were no handbooks; and the eyewitnesses were all dead and mouldered to dust long since.

A procedure had to be improvised. The Nobles and the Clergy were directed to meet in various regional centres and choose their delegations, an equal total from each *Estate*. So much was easy: but what about the *Tiers*? There were very many more of them, and, with an eye to the empty Exchequer, it was important to keep them in a good humour. It was decided, therefore, to give them as many representatives as the other two *Estates* put together.

At the same time, to give the well-to-do bourgeoisie and the lawyer-theoreticians a salutary notion of the dimensions of the difficulty facing the administrators, it was decided to make the election *indirect*, and use the occasion to obtain the *Cahiers de Doleances* already mentioned. All the inhabitants (male) in a parish met, discussed grievances, and chose delegates to a county meeting. The county meeting chose "electors," who met in the regional centre to make the final choice of deputies for the region.

If the Court imagined that when they had emerged from this ordeal the deputies would be suitably chastened and in a mood to see the problem as the administrative authorities saw it, the court made a bad guess. The deputies of the *Tiers*, when they assembled at *Versailles* at the beginning of May, 1789, did so with a keen consciousness of responsibility, not to the Court clique and the administrators whose self-confessed failure had made the summoning of the *States-General* imperative, but to themselves as men of probity and understanding, and to the people, who at various stages had participated in their election—the people, who were looking to them, not merely to restore the State finances, and to take the appropriate steps to ensure that they would not fall into the same condition of chaos again, but still more to secure the redress of grievances and, above all, to provide the nation with a *Constitution*.

In a word, the artful devices adopted by the Court to ensure the awed docility and pliability of the *Tiers* acted *boomerang fashion*. They ensured the reverse: the *Tiers* assembled in a mood and temper which, however little they knew it, was as *revolutionary* as was the mood of the English Commons in 1640, at the opening of the Long Parliament.

The issue was joined promptly, on the question whether the three *Estates* should meet, deliberate, and decide as separate "Houses" of Parliament, or whether they should, on the contrary, constitute a single Assembly. The Court was all for separate "Houses" as were the Noble and the Church Hierarchy; but until the *States-General* was actually assembled they had deemed it expedient to say nothing about this delicate point.

It was self-evident that if the *Estates* met and voted separately, the *Tiers* ran the risk of being permanently in a minority. If all the deputies, regardless of *Estate*, met and decided as a single chamber, the *Tiers* with as many deputies as the other two together had only to gain a few adherents from the poorer clergy, and the more progressive nobles to be permanently in a majority.

Therefore the *Tiers* at once commenced their struggle for a *single* assembly, with the King, the Court, the Nobles, and the Hierarchy all doing what they could to force upon them *separate* meetings as an accomplished fact.

The *Tiers* won—but only because they were resolute and determined, and stuck to their point obstinately for weeks.

It was this opening struggle which provided two, at least, of the great moments of the Revolution.

Shut out from their customary place of meeting by Court officials on a specious pretext, the *Tiers* assembled in a convenient Tennis Court and there took a solemn oath never to disperse or to allow themselves to be dispersed until they had given the Nation a Constitution. That oath of the Tennis Court (*Jeu de Paume*) was, deservedly, a first-favourite subject for painters, engravers, and print-sellers, especially in England where the analogy with the first decision of the Long Parliament—the Act making it illegal for the King to dissolve it without the consent of both Houses—was noted with satisfaction or misgiving according to the observer's political bias.

Similarly, when the King convoked a meeting to lecture the *Tiers* on the "mutinous" behaviour, and to order the Estates to meet *separately*, the *Tiers* obstinately kept their seats after

the King and the Court had departed and the Nobles and Clergy, obeying the Royal command, had dispersed. A Court chamberlain interrupted their debate to tell the *Tiers* that the King had commanded them to adjourn. Upon this, the speaker in possession of the floor, the famous *Mirabeau*, retorted in famous words:

“Go tell your master that we are here at the command of the People, and we will disperse only at the point of the bayonet.”

It worked. The *Tiers* had already given the other two Estates an ultimatum. It had resolved that on and after a certain date it would declare itself a National Assembly; that the other Estates might, if they chose, join in the organisation of this Assembly, but that whether or no, they the *Tiers* were going on with the job, if need be alone. The poorer majority of the clergy, and the more progressive nobles had gone over to the *Tiers*. And since, as we noted above, the King could do without the *Tiers* much less than they could do without him, there was nothing for it but for the Court to “throw the towel in.” The die-hard nobles, and the Hierarchy were requested by the King to discontinue their resistance. Thus the *States-General* became a National Assembly, which, since it immediately resolved to construct a Constitution, became distinguishable specifically as the “Constitutional” Assembly—or, in the French convention, the *Constituent*.

If one has a taste for drawing sharp dividing lines, one would say, with considerable justification, that the Revolution was accomplished when the *Constituent* inaugurated itself—with the tacit consent of the King and the Court—June 27th, 1789.

But already on June 17th, the *Tiers* had constituted itself the *National Assembly*. It had proclaimed the “indivisibility of the legislative power,” it had declared all taxes not authorized by itself illegal, and had granted the taxes then being collected, provisionally only; their legality to cease with the dissolution of the Assembly. It “restored the confidence of capitalists” by its decision to consolidate the public debt, and, to provide for the necessities of the people it appointed a Committee of Subsistence. The Tennis Court oath of June 20th was, therefore, an oath to stand by these decisions; the de-

fiance of Mirabeau on June 23rd was an announcement of the same unshaken resolve. Thus the Royal surrender of June 27th merely acknowledged as a fact accomplished the revolutionary decision of June 17th, confirmed by the Tennis Court oath and the Mirabeau defiance.

There is thus a case for choosing June 17th, 20th, 23rd, or 27th as the day on which the Revolution became actual. But by common consent that distinction is reserved for July 14th, the day on which the people of Paris stormed the Bastille—the day which in consequence has become France's National Day.

Reactionaries to whom any upsurge of insurrection is evidence of an outbreak of epidemic insanity in the "ignorant mob"—stirred up, usually, by interested knaves—are fond of belittling the Bastille episode. Sentimentalists explain it away as a thing of purely emotional significance. Yet, at the time, and to genuine realists, it was an occasion as decisive and of such practical urgency as to deserve all its reputation. The sentimentalists take the line that the Bastille was hated because it was used principally as a State prison in which men who had displeased authority were immured, without trial, on a simple warrant—*lettre de cachet*—which court officials, or the King himself, could issue, and would, at the request of any great noble. The Bastille was stormed, say the sentimentalists, because it was a hateful symbol of arbitrary Royal power affronting to the plain man's sense of justice.

The reactionaries agree; but add, as proof of the popular folly, that less than a dozen prisoners were found therein, that the garrison was negligible, and made only a feeble resistance; that, in short, the people of Paris made a terrific fuss about next to nothing at all.

The answer to all this that *an enemy force* in possession of the Bastille would have had all Paris at its mercy.. The people of Paris destroyed the Bastille as an act of elementary self-defence. But was there any "enemy force" in sight? Was there any risk of it garrisoning the Bastille—with hostile intent?

There was. The force was assembling at Versailles and at various points around Paris. It was a force composed in part of foreign mercenaries (the Royal German Regiment, the

Royal Swiss, and, alas! the Royal Irish) and, for the rest, of regiments deemed reliable by their reactionary-aristocratic commanders. It was assembling under the direction of the reactionary Court faction (the "Queen's party"), who saw clearly what the establishment of the *Constituent* was going to mean for them and their privileges, and who, contemptuous of the "weakness" with which the King and the moderates in the Privy Council had given way to advice of the Finance Minister Necker, and the determination of the *Tiers*, were resolved, with or without the King's compliance, to bring about a *coup d'état*—to overawe Paris, to remove the Assembly to some remote place where, with its "rebel ring-leaders" purged away, it could be coerced into doing nothing but what it was ordered to do.

In Versailles, a populous town, the *Tiers* could rely upon mass support; Paris, only a few miles away, was wild with enthusiasm for the *Tiers*. From the counter-revolutionary point of view, it was absolutely imperative to hold Paris in check, and, above all, to bar the road from Paris to Versailles. For this operation, the Bastille formed a strategical strong point of first-rank importance.

Originally built outside the gates of Paris, as much as a Royal menace to its citizens as an advance post for its defence, the Bastille had become geographically incorporated in Paris by the simple spread of the town around it. It still commanded the road from the east, but still more it was in 1789, and from the point of view of a counter-revolutionary commander operating from Versailles, a strong-point established right in the heart of Paris and able to paralyse its defences. It was not expedient to garrison the Bastille too heavily, too soon. That would have sounded the alarm. But that it was part of the counter-revolutionary plan to garrison it, and that doing this was imminent cannot be doubted.

Popular rumour in Paris and in Versailles had kept abreast of the progress of the counter-revolutionary plot. Unmistakable signs were the conflicts which developed between parading parties of Royal German dragoons and the Parisians. The *Garde Française*—one of the largest and best of the Royal regiments—refused to fire on the people. The "ring-leaders" were arrested, and were released from prison by the "mob."

Parties of the *Garde Francaise* drove the marauding *Royal Germans* from Paris.

Then, at the critical moment, on July 11th, the news came that Finance Minister Necker had been dismissed and sent into banishment. It was clear that the die-hards had won; that the King himself had surrendered to the conspirators; that counter-revolution was thus placed officially as the next item on the agenda.

Then it was that the Parisians, roused to frenzy, rose up and, assisted by the *Garde Francaise* stormed the Bastille.

Their deed begot a famous "crack": "But this," said the astonished king to the officer who reported what had happened, "this is a revolt!" "No, sir!" was the imperturbable answer: "It is a revolution!"

It was that; and for the very good reason that, a surprise *coup* being now out of the question, any attempt to go further with the plot meant an immediate transition to civil war.

The Court, and the conspirators, could do nothing but give way.

Lenin has some wise words that occur at once to the memory: "For a revolution to happen it is not sufficient that the mass of the people is unwilling to go on living in the old way: it must have become impossible for the old order to carry on in their old fashion."

How impossible it was to carry on with the *ancien regime* was proved on the great day of July 14th 1789, when the Parisians stormed the Bastille. As the reactionaries say, it was not defended to the uttermost. But even so, more than a hundred Parisians had been killed before it surrendered. That in itself is sufficient to show what the Bastille might have become; and how imperative it was to take it.

The people's instinct is sound; the French Revolution proper did begin on July 14th.

What proves this beyond question is the effect the great news produced as it spread through the countryside.

Everywhere, as a result of the discussions prior to the elections, hopes had been roused. These in the months of delay had turned to irritation and despair. Then came the news of Paris in revolt; and, as at a signal, the countryside

rose in revolt, too. Chateaux and convents were stormed; manor barns and tithe barns were looted; the records of feudal servitude were routed out and burned, sometimes along with the chateaux in which they had been preserved. Jacques Bouthonnier's essay herein, on the *Peasants*, analyses the situation admirably, and shows its cause. He shows, too, how another great day of the Revolution has been romanticized by reactionary-sentimentalist historians.

The conventional version is that at the evening session of the *Constituent* on August 4th aristocrats and ecclesiastics, caught by a sacred flame of enthusiasm, vied with each other in surrendering voluntarily—in decreeing the abolition of—all their feudal rights and privileges; their right to force contributions in cash or kind or labour service, to impose regulations and tolls, to monopolize the preservation and killing of game, to hold their own courts of justice, imposing their own manor laws, and so on. Something resembling this did happen; but it was not nearly the “Saint Bartholomew night of property” it has been called. As Jacques Bouthonnier shows, with the peasantry roused and in arms, the attempt to enforce some of these rights would have involved civil war on a grand scale. Even as it was, civil war of a sporadic and guerrilla kind did break out periodically all through the countryside, especially in the west and the south-west, where the aristocracy and the recalcitrant priests had their strongest grip. It would have been universal but for the “surrender” of August 4th, 1789. The feudal claims were “surrendered” with an air of grace, but only after they had been abolished in fact by the revolutionary mass-action of the peasantry. Many of these claims were abolished only “in principle”—they remained legally enforceable until the *Constituent* had decided the amount and mode of payment of the commutation price, which price the very resolution of surrender fixed at *thirty years' purchase*.

At most the nobles and ecclesiastics surrendered what they could no longer retain; they secured in return substantial bourgeois incomes, and the backing of the new régime for the enforcement of their rights until the commutation price had been paid in full. Years later their claims were still being presented, and rousing fierce popular resistance.

This struggle in the countryside, which went on all through the lifetime of the *Constituent*, and of its successor

the *Legislative*, along with the concomitant struggles over matters economic—the sale of the confiscated estates of the Church, the *assignat* currency, prices, grain cornering and so on—all helps to throw an air of unreality over the labours of the *Constituent*.

True to their pledge, the deputies did not disperse until they had given the country a Constitution, one modelled on the English Constitution as established by the Whig revolution of 1688, modified in the light of the experience of the U.S.A. And much of what they did—such as the extinction of the old Provinces, and their replacement by a system of “departments” the reorganization of the legal system, etc.—had a permanent value.

For all that, the Constitution they evolved proved a complete miscarriage—a thing fabricated in a vacuum which collapsed into a chaos of incompatibles at the first impact of reality.

The *Constituent* began magnificently with the French equivalent of the English *Bill of Rights* and the American *Declaration of Independence*—namely, the famous *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* adopted on August 26th. 1789. But when its labours concluded in July, 1791, the high poetical enthusiasm of the Declaration had toned down into the sober prose of dividing the citizens, upon whom had descended the blessings of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, into the two contrasted categories of “active” and “passive,” the dividing line being fixed by the citizen’s assessment to State taxes. Those who paid—or were liable to pay—a certain minimum sum, fixed beyond the means of ordinary working men, were the “active” citizens. They alone could elect, or be elected, they alone were eligible for service in the National Guard, the civic militia, established spontaneously everywhere (as a defence against counter-revolution and brigandage) after July 14th, 1789, which the *Constituent* skilfully brought under State and municipal direction and incorporated in the Constitution.

This exclusion of the “passive” citizens—a large majority of the population—from direct participation in the government of the country, and still more the naive “arming of the bourgeoisie” as against the lower orders implicit in the

National Guard, formed an ironic contrast to the exalted idealism of the Rights of Man, a contract exciting anger that was to find expression in fierce class-strife.

The Constitution as it finally emerged in September, 1791, was at one and the same time an acute expression of bourgeois property-consciousness, and a complete refusal in the eighteenth-century philosophical manner to admit that such things as *classes* really existed. It provided neatly-balanced mechanism adjusting the relations between the rulers and ruled, between the King and his ministers as the executive power, the Assembly as the legislative power, and the judiciary as the punitive, restraining, and rectifying power of the *Citizens*, individually and collectively. But the citizens it envisaged were ideal, abstract, citizens, the King an ideal-abstract-monarch—things that never were or could be. Consequently, from its birth the Constitution was faced with the fact that, in an epoch of the revolutionary transformation of an old régime into a new one, “men fight out the issue as a *class-struggle* conscious of their opposing interests.”

From the night of August 4th, 1789, the Constitution had been menaced—long before it was born—by the counter-revolutionary determination of the Court and the aristocracy to win back, one way or another, the ruling power that had slipped from their grasp. They were willing to commute their feudal claims into bourgeois property rights; but they were not willing to surrender their class control of the State, their monopoly of remunerative State posts, their class-control of the armed forces of the Crown, and their distinct social ascendancy.

The general revolt through the countryside produced even before the night of August 4th, 1789, a great flight of nobles from France. It was noted at the time that two unusual visitations arrived in the South of England in the summer of 1789—a swarm of French aristocrats fleeing from their burning chateaux, and the vengeance of those they had oppressed, and a swarm of game birds escaping from the mass assault of the French country-folk enjoying for the first time the privilege of shooting game. Other waves of aristocratic emigration left France during the labours of the *Constituent*, and these gathered at Brussels, at Worms, and especially at Coblenz and organized themselves as a Provisional Government.

and as cadres for a counter-revolutionary invasion of France.

To provide for the needs of the Exchequer, and for the State debts—largely owed, by the way, to the wealthy bourgeois themselves—the *Constituent* adopted the device of confiscating the immense estates of the Church and using the proceeds of their sale to provide revenue and the means of extinguishing indebtedness. To make this confiscation practicable, the State had to be charged with the responsibility previously borne, in theory, by the Church estates. It had to guarantee the upkeep of the Church, the salaries of the priests, and the organization of “charity”—otherwise public assistance. Naturally, the *Constituent* saw the advantages of making the clergy salaried dependents of the State. Equally naturally, the aristocratic members of the Church Hierarchy were furious at the loss of their princely revenues, and they grasped the opportunity presented to them by the decree that the clergy must—to qualify for their State salaries—take an oath to uphold the Constitution. This was represented as a gross trespass upon the autonomy of the Church, the disciplinary rights of the Hierarchy, and ultimately upon the authority of the Pope and the indissoluble unity of the Church and Christendom. Priests were encouraged to refuse the oath and then to constitute themselves leaders of a passive resistance to State authority which could on occasion, and did, become active counter-revolutionary struggle.

For their part, the lower orders in town and country were equally dissatisfied with the labours of the *Constituent*; not however because it changed things too much, but because it did not change them enough.

The essays given hereunder on the *Peasants* and on the *Working Class*, along with that on the *Finances*, will be found infinitely revealing and explanatory of the grounds of popular discontent.

The peasants complained because, though freed from bondage in form, they were still subject to feudal exactions in fact. The sales of the confiscated Church lands, and later those of the Crown and the emigrant aristocracy, were so long delayed, and so managed that they gave more openings for wealthy speculators than for peasants hungry for land of their own.

The town workers suffered grievously from the unemployment that resulted from the sudden and complete cessation of the luxury spending of the Court and aristocracy—not yet replaced by the luxury spending of the “new rich”—and from the general dislocation and interruption of trade produced by the revolutionary excitement and disturbances.

Both town and country workers suffered from the rapid evaporation of the purchasing power of the new *assignat* paper currency—itself a by-product of the operation of the land speculators and the currency-jobbers—which depreciation of the currency was reflected in a steep rise in the price of necessaries. This again was made an intolerable affliction by the activities of the speculators who “cornered” whatever they could, but especially grain. Finally, the depreciation of the currency, the inflation of prices, the shortage of necessaries, local and general, with their exasperating consequences, were all made worse deliberately by the sabotaging activity of counter-revolutionary agents—those of the emigrants and of the various enemy Powers who, by the time the *Constituent* had concluded its labours, had formed a Coalition of Kings and ruling prices to check the spread of “French principles” and to menace the Revolution in France with a war of intervention.

This menace of war, which became an actuality in 1792, was thenceforward a prime determinant of the course of the Revolution.

Before the *Constituent* had concluded its labours, the King and the Court had decided that the time had come to attempt to check any further progress of the Revolution by a military *coup d'etat*.

Most of the Army officers were still aristocrats; many were secretly in league with the Counter-Revolutionary chiefs at Coblenz. The Continental kings, headed by the Austrian Emperor, brother of Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, were ready to invade, if only the French King would invite them to do so. He hesitated for two reasons: first, because he was virtually a prisoner in the hands of the people of Paris, and, second, because he was not too sure that he wanted to be “saved” by an intervening power which might in the end leave him less real power than the Constitution he was eager to escape.

At any rate, one general—Bouille, commanding at Metz—was devoted to the King, and ready to run all the risks of organizing and conducting a *coup d'etat*. The King thought it would be very much better for him if he could contrive to get rid of the *Constituent* and its precious Constitution without calling in foreign aid. Therefore he managed to escape from the palace by night, and, in disguise, tried to make his way to the camp at Metz.

His flight was discovered (June 20th, 1791) and he himself, stopped at Varennes, was brought back to Paris under arrest.

To the masses this flight was flagrant treachery to the Revolution; accordingly, they demanded an instant deposition of the King. Their more advanced elements openly advocated the setting up of a republic. To the moderate Constitutionalists, it was alternatively an embarrassment, and an opportunity to drive a political bargain.

It was an embarrassment in that there was available no really satisfactory candidate as an alternative occupant of the kingly office, which they deemed indispensable. It was an opportunity in that they could, and did, "suspend" the King from the exercise of his functions, and restore him only in return for his pledge to accept the Constitution and observe it faithfully. The moderate Constitutionalists, the Centre Party in the *Constituent*, found strong allies in the Right wing party—the "King's friends"—and between them they evolved the fiction that the King had not tried to run away, voluntarily, but had been "abducted."

The masses protested; and a petition drawn up by the Jacobin club—the most popular of the political societies the Revolution had begotten—which demanded the suspension of the King permanently, was signed by thousands daily at the Altar of the country on the Field of Mars, a ceremonial parade-ground which had been constructed for the celebration of the first anniversary of the Day of the Bastille, and which was used thenceforward for all public parades and festivals.

This mass signing of a petition which virtually demanded a republic was viewed with alarm by the Court and anger by the *Constituent*. The Marquis de Lafayette, as Commandant-general of the National Guard, was requested to disperse the "disorderly" assembly, and he did so with a volley of musketry.

Thus for the first time the revolutionary masses were brought into direct collision with the quasi-revolutionary constitutionalists. The growth of the masses in organization, unity, and revolutionary determination was, from this point onward until July, 1794, the second chief determinant of the course of the Revolution. The essay on the *Popular Masses* herein is an invaluable aid to the comprehension of this growth.

War, when it broke out in April, 1792, revealed the attitude of the various classes to the Revolution, and to the nation, in sharply defined clarity. It revealed the King and the Court—especially the Queen—as actively urging on the invader in their secret correspondence, while in their solemn public acts they conducted ~~the~~ war and urged the nation to make every sort of sacrifice to secure victory.

It revealed the nobility as either openly in the camp of the invader or treacherously at work, as officers in the Army and commandants of fortified towns and camps, getting ready to sell the pass to the invader as soon as the opportunity offered.

It revealed the well-to-do speculators and cornerers as ready to seize the occasion of war as a God-sent chance to make more money than ever as Army contractors and monopolists of necessary supplies.

It revealed the recalcitrant priests as active fomenters of sabotages and insurrection—particularly in the west, in the Vendée.

And it revealed the popular masses, led by the stauncher elements of the bourgeoisie and the intellectuals, as ready for any display of creative revolutionary initiative in order to save the country. So manifest was it that the King and the Court desired a victory for the invaders that it became imperative to compel a change of government, to secure the national leadership without which victory over the invader would be unattainable. This was effected by the famous insurrection of August 10th, 1792—a date less often celebrated, but equal in glory to the better-known July 14th, 1789.

On August 10th, 1792, the popular masses, organized by the Sections—the local or ward administrations which had

grown out of the electoral assemblies—stormed the Tuileries Palace, compelled the Legislative Assembly to suspend the King's exercise of his functions, to place the King and Queen under arrest, and to summon immediately a National Convention, elected by universal manhood suffrage.

The *Convention* when it assembled at once proclaimed a republic and called for the *levy en masse* of the whole population to clear the invaders beyond the frontiers. The response was in proportion to the patriotic zeal the masses had already shown. The historic victory of the conscript army at Valmy on September 2nd, 1792, was an immediate consequence of the political victory won by the masses on August 10th. The *Convention*, the Republic, and the military successes of 1793 which cleared the frontiers were its logical consummation.

Much of the popular misunderstanding which reactionaries in England have been able to foster about the French Revolution takes its rise from the difficulty of comprehending without an adequate grasp of the background circumstances: the dramatic succession of events and crises which marked the culmination of the Revolution in the period from August 10th, 1792, to the overthrow of Robespierre and the Jacobin dictatorship on July 27th, 1794—the period of the guillotine, the Terror, the strife to the uttermost between the Gironde and the Jacobins; the epoch of the triumph of the *sans-culottes*, the “men without breeches.”

Yet on a sober review, and in the light of its actual causative connections, no period should be more easy to understand—or less needing apology.

There was, first of all, in the first days of September, 1792, that purging of the prisons which reactionary historians know as the “September Massacres.” We who have lived to know how real a menace a “Fifth Column” can be are qualified to understand the mood of the Parisian masses torn between their duty to depart to take their places in the armies guarding the frontiers and their fears for the safety of their families and of the country if they departed leaving hundreds of “Fifth Columnists” in a position to co-operate with the invader, who was already at Verdun, and to whom Longwy had already been basely surrendered.

The Generalissimo of the counter-revolutionary invaders, Marshal the Duke of Brunswick, had already issued his menacing proclamation, threatening every town which resisted, and promising exemplary punishment for all Parisians who had, or who might thereafter, offer any sort of "insult" to the majesty of the King.

The Brunswick Manifesto was issued, obviously with the connivance and consent of the King, the Queen, and the Court, on July 25th, 1792. The reply of the people of Paris was August 10th, and, since the prisons were full of those arrested on suspicion of "quislingism"—and justly so suspected in the majority of cases—the logical follow-up of the storming of the Tuilleries was the mass purging of the prisons. Even reactionaries are constrained to admit that these "quislings" had so many friends in high places that they were likely to be released at any time it seemed politically safe to do so. Even reactionaries are constrained to admit that the masses, who conducted the purging, did make a serious endeavour to separate the innocent from the guilty, and did rejoice sincerely when a prisoner could be released—as virtually one-third of them were released—to the cry of *Vive la Nation!* And whether they admit it or not, it is self-evident that the vengeance of Brunswick, if he and his counter-revolutionary accomplices had reached Paris, would have been far bloodier, and far more indiscriminate.

Even so, it was an ugly business, and the only revolutionary authority the people would listen to, the Commune of Paris, set up by delegates from the Sections on the eve of August 10th, laboured incessantly and at last successfully, to bring the summary executions to an end. Marat deplored the outbreak outspokenly, but said with justice that those really to blame were Brunswick and his fellow conspirators at Court. Robespierre and Danton had no hand in the business; but, like the Girondin leaders, they did nothing to stop the executions once they had begun. But then it was a risky business for anyone to interfere, when even the Commune could not intervene without serious risk.

Similarly with the Terror, and the battle to the death between the Girondins and the Jacobins. If this is envisaged merely as a vendetta between rival political factions interested

in nothing but the difference between being in office and out of it, the whole episode becomes a nightmare horror, depressing to the limit in its evidence of the depth to which men can descend. But if we envisage it as a surface phenomenon—the form in which becomes apparent the Titanic birth-pangs of a nation in travail, a new social order struggling to get born—the episode assumes a significance of tragic immensity.

Once again as a background we must envisage the French nation surrounded by implacable foes—the Coalition of Kings, often defeated by the stupendous dash and courage of the conscript armies and the genius of the revolutionary generals, but always returning to the attack, impelled by the fear of what would happen to them if the revolutionary contagion crossed the frontiers to infect their own serfs and vassal peoples. We must, to be just, realize that in this Coalition the most dangerous and most persistent enemy of the Revolution was none other than King George III, or, more properly, his Prime Minister, William Pitt, and the aristocratic landlord-cum-money-capitalist oligarchy who then ruled Great Britain.

If we envisage the matter rightly, we shall see that the newly-born French Republic and nation was in imminent peril of destruction over and over again. It was saved, over and over again, by the self-sacrificing steadfastness of the masses and their revolutionary unity and solidarity. And that is the point: this unity and solidarity which begot both the steadfastness and the creative revolutionary initiative was in danger repeatedly from a score of points of attack. The Jacobins, led in different ways at different times by Marat, Danton, and Robespierre, were not formally the most “extreme” of the revolutionary parties. Far from it, Robespierre has been described, with justice, as occupying the exact centre between the extremes of Right and Left. Danton was, in the end, executed by the Tribunal, at Robespierre’s instigation, for his “moderation.” Jean Jaurès, by a minute study, was able to reveal that Marat—miscalled a “monster” ever since Carlyle slandered him—was truly a kindly man, passionately on the side of justice, especially for the “under-dog.”

That, however, gives us the correct standpoint. The Jacobins were able to keep together the greatest attainable unity and solidarity in the popular masses because they were

prepared to go to all the lengths necessary to save the nation and with it the gains of the Revolution. The Girondins, as the representatives of the wealthy upper strata of the bourgeoisie—taking their name from the region their leaders represented in the *Convention*, the region of large vine-growers, wine-exporters, and shippers with heavy investments in the sugar, tobacco, and rum manufactories in the West Indies—were staunch for the Revolution up to the point at which power rested in the hands of their class, the upper strata of the bourgeoisie.

The practical difficulty was that this upper strata of the bourgeoisie could not get to this point without rousing into action, not only the rest of the bourgeoisie, but, still more, the whole of the popular masses, and these could not be roused into action without rousing in them a conviction of the need for and their power to obtain a full measure of emancipation for themselves. And the tragic-ronic corollary of this was that the Girondins—who, it must be remembered, were originally members of the Jacobin Club, and whose members had at least a share of responsibility for the uprising of August 10th, 1792—when they reached the point at which they wished to arrest the Revolution, and begin the “restoration of order,” found the country in a situation in which arresting the Revolution meant dissipating the revolutionary unity which was the sole barrier between the nation and enslavement by the counter-revolutionary invaders

The Jacobins who fought the Girondins were the representatives of the more far-sighted bourgeoisie, as well as of the popular masses in town and country. The historical irony involved is that the Revolution could not be saved for the bourgeoisie without a desperate attempt, which, however unwillingly, the Jacobins had to lead, to turn it into something beyond a bourgeois revolution—something approximating to a proletarian-socialist revolution. The Jacobin endeavour to restore or at least maintain the value of the *assignat*, their carrying through of the sales of the confiscated land, their endeavour to establish an ideally democratic constitution (in the Constitution of 1793), their direction of the Terror against speculators, currency manipulators, incompetent and treacherous generals, and “Fifth Columnists” generally—in all these

things we can see plainly the pressure of the popular needs, and the fact that, after all, the Jacobins were historically the tools of the masses, whom they roused, organized, and helped to make articulate.

As further proof of this is found in the occasion which gave rise to the Thermidorian revolt of the *Convention* against Robespierre and Jacobin domination.

By then the solidarity and energy of the masses had achieved all, and more than all, that could be hoped from it. The invaders had been driven from French soil; the armies of the Republic had proved themselves to be collectively the most formidable military force the world had known till then. The emigrant bands had been discredited and discarded, as organized forces, by the Kings, to whom they had brought nothing but military disaster. The "Fifth Columnists" at home had been correspondingly discredited, disorganized, and dispersed. There was still speculators and currency manipulators; but the Terror and the guillotine had compelled them to be at least, discreet. The law of a maximum price for necessities—which our own wartime experience proves to be indispensable—had been adopted as a final check. As demanded by the popular spokesmen in this respect also, the Jacobin leaders were preparing a measure to levy a drastic forced loan on the proved "enemies of the people" and the suspiciously over-wealthy new rich. This was to provide a fund for public assistance to "necessitous patriots."

It was the threat of this "capital levy," with an acute and guilty consciousness of what it might lead to, which begot the split in the Jacobin party and *Thermidor*.

It gives an important clue to the actual situation to remember that Robespierre and Saint-Just and the "Jacobin dictators" could only be overthrown by *Jacobins*, and that Robespierre himself had sacrificed by destroying the Hébertists, the force that he needed, when the pinch came to save him from the Thermidorian reaction. Also, it is illuminating to learn that a contributory factor making the masses lukewarm to Robespierre's peril was the inclusion of "the workman's wages" under the law of maximum. Even so, the news of the fall of Robespierre was received with gloom and distrust by the rank and file of the Army in the field.

In one form or another, however, the Revolution was foredoomed to come to an end sometime; and there was historically no possibility of maintaining it at the point upon which Robespierre and Saint-Just desired to consolidate it. The masses were impelled by urgent necessity to demand more and more, and would continue to be so impelled until the effects of the Revolution had become apparent in an increased and stabilized demand for wage-labour and a correspondingly stable condition of the market for necessities. Hence, despite *Thermidor*, the masses in Paris made a whole series of efforts to regain the power, virtually to dictate the social policy of the Revolution. It was notable that the customary slogan in these revolts was "Bread! and the Constitution of '93."

That was the slogan of the last flicker of the revolutionary flame, the *Conspiracy of the Equals*, leaded by Gracchus Babœuf in 1796—the episode in which Marx finds the germinal form of what was to become the Communist movement and Party which Marx himself, with Frederich Engels, was to transform and equip with a scientific consciousness.

It must suffice here to note that Babœuf returned to the point at which Robespierre broke down and proposed, along with the enforcement of the suspended Constitution of '93, a drastic confiscation of the superfluous wealth of the rich, and its distribution to relieve the necessities of the poor.

And that:

It was Babœuf who proclaimed that:

"In a properly organised state of society there would be neither rich nor poor."

"The rich who are unwilling to surrender their superfluities for the benefit of the poor are the people's enemies."

This, as Marx says, is a "erude and uneivilized" form of Communism; but none the less it reveals itself unmistakably as a connecting transitional form between the Jacobinism of Marat, who hated profiteers and profiteering with an undying hate, and the scientific socialism of Karl Marx and his greatest disciples, Lenin and Stalin.

It is their consciousness of this affiliation that gives unity and community of thought and purpose to all the writers represented in this volume.

They all write as Marxists and as Communists, in ardent solidarity with the Bolshevik Revolution and Joseph Stalin, the banner-bearer of Communism and battle-leader of the heroic army and people of the U.S.S.R.

For Marxism there is, in the final analysis, only one science—the science of history—and how inspiring in its all-embracing totality that science can become these essays each and all of them reveal.

They show how vastly a single historic period gains if it can be seen in its true connection in the development process of human society. The French Revolution was a gigantic event from any standpoint. But it is next door to unintelligible until it is seen against a world background as one of a series of stages in the historical becoming of bourgeois or capitalist society. Seen in its sequence with the English revolutions of 1640 and 1688, and them in turn in sequence with the Great Protestant Reformation struggle in Germany, these three great uprisings of the bourgeoisie become comprehensible alike in respect of their historic inevitability and their creative initiative.

And, seeing them in this light, we can understand why our French comrades find such a sustaining inspiration in the contemplation of their own heroic past.

As bourgeois society had to get born, not without pangs, so too a new society has already begun to emerge as the historical offspring of bourgeois society. As the feudal ruling system had to be burst asunder and destroyed to make possible the safe delivery of the bourgeois society it had unwittingly prepared for, so, too, in the end, the rule of the bourgeoisie must be made to yield to the imperious demands of historical necessity.

And just as the heroic people of France, the peasants, the artisans, the labourers, the *petit-bourgeoisie*, the intellectuals, and the progressive bourgeoisie all combined to meet and crush with their revolutionary courage, energy, and solidarity the embattled hosts of feudal reaction, so once again and on a world scale history presents us with the inescapable need for a parallel courage, energy, and unity to meet, defeat, and crush out the barbarous hordes of an even more bestial reaction, the

hosts of Nazism and other varieties of Fascism, which aim at nothing less than the enslavement of the whole world.

Nothing is finer in this volume than Georges Politzer's triumphant proof that Marxian dialectical materialism is the true heir and continuation of the brilliant enlightenment philosophy of the Encyclopædists at whose head fought the inimitable Denis Diderot. Englishmen who know how our own English philosophers, from Bacon, through Hobbes and Locke to Isaac Newton, were an indispensable preparation for the enlightenment philosophy, can rightly share in that enthusiastic pride and hail its liberating truth. We can point with pride to the proof advanced in the articles herein on the *Sciences* and the *Arts* as unanswerable demonstrations of the truth that it is only he whose feet are firmly planted on the earth who can see any way at all into the realm of the stars.

Our feet are on the earth, it is true; and so we shall keep them. But that, after all, is why, since we stand erect our hearts and our heads are anything but on the ground or in the mist; why they are free to make the leap from the realm of necessity to that of freedom, and to hail all the conquests of the human spirit as treasures won for us, in common with all mankind, as inspirations, as well as equipment, for the conquests which it is at once our privilege and our pride to be forced to attempt.

We salute the French Revolution. We have, happily, no need to be either Girondin or Jacobin, Dantonist, Robespierrist, Maratist, or Hebertist. We are for the Revolution as a gigantic battle won in the onward march of humanity, and we join our French comrades in our conviction that its memory is an imperishable sign that in our own day the people will triumph yet again, and triumph this time in a way that will last.

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY¹

By Maurice Thorez

Deputy For Seine,
General Secretary Of The French Communist
Party.

THE Communist Party has celebrated the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Great French Revolution with particular enthusiasm. Why does the working class, led by the Communist Party, celebrate the memory of 1789 with such fervour? To find the answer, we must note the attitude of different people to the French Revolution.

Let us begin with the declared enemies of the working class and the common people in general—the Fascist fomenters of war. Mussolini rages on every occasion against the “immoral principles of 1789.” To the principles of the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen” he opposes the Fascist doctrine. He has written: “Fascism is opposed to all the utopias and innovations of the Jacobins”; that it is a reaction against the “‘Enlightenment’ movement and the Encyclopaedists of the eighteenth century.”

Hitler proclaims that “democracy is a lie.” His dwarf, Goebbels, has written: “the year 1789 will be erased from history.” Goebbels does not know, or hopes to make the German people forget, the thought expressed by Goethe, the greatest of her poets, on the evening of the Battle of Valmy, September 20th, 1792: “Here and to-day begins a new era in the history of the world, and you will be able to say that you were there.”

The Fascists of France, agents of foreign Powers and hirelings of capital, naturally feel the same hatred against the achievements of the Great Revolution, against the ideals of progress, of justice and of liberty which it expressed and disseminated throughout the world.

¹ Speech delivered at the Buffalo Stadium, Paris, June 25th, 1939.

The bourgeois who do not sympathize with Fascism have a different interpretation of the Great Revolution. For them 1789 was a necessity and a boon; but they consider, firstly, that everything was settled definitely by the Revolution of 1789; and, secondly, that the great days of the Revolution, its manifestations of extreme revolutionary audacity and energy, are "excesses," to be at least deplored, if not condemned outright.

This opinion reflects purely and simply the class interest of the capitalist bourgeois whom the Revolution brought to power. The ideologists of the bourgeoisie would like to elevate the production relations of capitalist society into eternal categories. They proclaim principles and arguments which express the economic and political supremacy of the bourgeoisie as eternal truths. These bourgeois forget completely that the feudalists—the aristocracy and the clergy, with the King at their head—who were deprived of their rights and privileges by the Revolution, likewise believed, or pretended to believe, in the eternal truth of their domination over the people. But the earth has not stopped turning, and another system of society, communist society, will succeed capitalist society, in the same way as capitalist society replaced feudal society.

Yet, as in 1789, it will be necessary to assist the child-birth. That is the role of revolution. The big bourgeoisie can no longer reason like Clemenceau, who maintained that he accepted "the Revolution *en bloc*." The bourgeoisie no longer wishes to admit, and, indeed, cannot admit, that without the July 14th, 1789, without the August 10th, 1792, without the Committee of Public Safety, without the Revolutionary Terror, the old order of things, the feudal system, could not have been demolished and swept away to make way for the new regime, the capitalist regime.

The bourgeoisie knows in fact that the Revolution, bourgeois-democratic in its content, had necessarily to set in motion the poorest and most miserable strata of the population; that, at least in the first phase, they had to rely on them. Thereafter the enlarged scope of the productive forces under the capitalist system, freed from the obstacles of feudalism, not only led to the reinforcement of the power of the bourgeoisie—it developed considerably the

class of the industrial proletariat: "the grave-diggers of capitalism."

The working class became conscious of itself, of its aims, of the historic mission incumbent upon it as representing the general interests of the people and of humanity. The working class a century ago already raised its own flag, the flag of the workers of Lyons (1832), of the Parisian workers of 1848, of the Communards of 1871—the flag which now flies victoriously over a sixth of the world.

It is true that there are men in the Liberal wing of the bourgeoisie who, even if they do not go so far as to recognize the imprescriptible right of the working-class to revolution, justify the deeds, however "extreme," of the most consistent bourgeois revolutionaries—especially those of Robespierre and the Jacobins. This is already an important step forward. Lenin often emphasized that

"the historians of the bourgeoisie see in Jacobinism a downfall (to 'sink'). The proletarian historians regard Jacobinism as the greatest expression of an oppressed class in its struggle for liberation. The Jacobins gave France the best models of a democratic revolution; they repelled in an exemplary fashion the coalition of monarchs formed against the republic."¹

Yet those rare advanced bourgeois who are prepared to recognize the merits of Robespierre condemn Hebert and Marat, and still more Babeuf—that is to say, those who expressed the interests of the most ardent and combative section of the revolutionary masses, the section which at the same time was the most needy and the most completely disinherited. They repudiate Babeuf, who sketched the first Communist answer to the questions asked by the exploited, although, in view of the period, in a form necessarily utopian.

There also exist some "philosophers," some "social thinkers" who extol what they call an economic '89. This would involve, it would appear, within the political framework of '89, an economic organization of society, to ensure more justice, by nibbling at the superfluity of the owners,

¹ Lenin: *Collected Works*, Vol. xx. p. 278. "Can 'Jacobinism' Frighten the Working Class?"

of the social parasites, and distributing this to the workers and peasant producers. These people base their reasoning on the past; they look backwards. They do not understand, or do not want to understand that the task of the working class is to evolve Communist society—to bring to birth the factors now ripening within capitalist society, as the bourgeois revolutionaries of 1789 had as their mission to destroy the feudal framework, to make room for that expansion of the capitalist system of production, which the progress of technique and the development of the productive forces of feudal society itself had made necessary and inevitable.

The French working class has not to achieve 1789: it must accomplish the equivalent of a "1917" for the people of France—the conquest of power, the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat, which will undertake the construction of Socialism, so that we also shall march on the road to the Communism which is certain and inevitable.

Outside of our ranks, we Communists see, therefore, a notable division of opinion about the French Revolution, its course and its achievements. Even amongst those who proclaim themselves of the Revolution, attempts are made to exalt this or that group of revolutionaries of 1789, this or that historic personality; Girondin or Jacobin,¹ Danton or Robespierre. Attempts are made to cut the chain of events that links the Revolution of yesterday with the Revolution of to-day and to-morrow. Let us re-read the words of the great Victor Hugo:

"At an unknown depth Mirabeau felt Robespierre moving; Robespierre felt Marat; Marat felt Hebert; Hebert felt Babœuf."

We who see things and men as Communists, as representatives of the working class, can, like Hugo, pay homage to the work of all. We consider them as elements in one immortal and fertile achievement. We honour the memory of each good artisan in the French Revolution for the part he played. We salute Mirabeau for his proud reply to the King's messenger: "Go tell your master that we are here

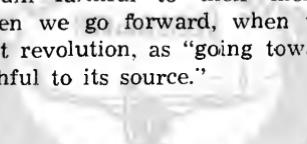
¹ *Gironde* or *Girondins* were what would be referred to as the Right wing of the revolutionaries. They were, in fact, the representatives in the Legislative Assembly and later in the Convention of

in obedience to the will of the people; and we will leave only at the point of the bayonet."

Last year at Grenoble we honoured the memory of Barnave, that great progressive bourgeois—typical representative of his class when aspiring to power—this Girondin whom the march of the Revolution was to reject and crush. A fortnight ago at Troyes, near the birthplace of Danton, another who also stumbled, we recalled his precept of revolutionary action: "Audacity, more audacity, always audacity." At Arras, where he was born, we celebrated the glorious memory of Robespierre, of whom Mirabeau had said: "He will go far, for he believes everything he says."

All, in different degrees, brought progress; they were the animators of the magnificent epic of our people.

And we remain faithful to their memory and their achievements, when we go forward, when we prepare ourselves for the next revolution, as "going towards the sea, the river remains faithful to its source."



the big bourgeoisie, of the growing capitalists who were opposed to the mass of the people and their demands. They took their title from the fact that their outstanding representatives were the deputies of Gironde. In the later stages they allied themselves with the counter-revolutionaries, the men of Coblenz and all reactionary forces against the progressive democratic revolutionary forces.

Jacobins were the representatives of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants and tended towards supporting the demands of the great mass of the people. The basis of their policy and support will be found in the studies which follow. They got their name from the "Club of the Jacobins" (see p. 94). At the time of the Convention and henceforth, they were also known as *la Montagne* and the *Montagnards* (or Mountain), because they occupied the top benches. The Centre or unattached deputies who sat in the pit were known as *la Plaine* (the Plain).

THE FOREIGN CONSPIRACY AGAINST THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

By Jacques Duclos

Vice-President Of The Chamber of Deputies,
Secretary Of The French Communist Party

THE French Revolution, which 150 years ago razed to the ground the old feudal power, was exposed to plots hatched by the reactionary powers of Europe who watched with fear the profound political and social changes taking place in France. True, when in April, 1789, the parishes of France drew up their *Cahiers de Doleances* (Book of Complaints) in preparation for the calling of the States-General, demonstrations of loyalty and respect to the king were the rule. But this loyalty of the popular masses to royalty was to receive severe blows.

It is in fact true that in the *Cahiers de Doleances* which bore witness to the width and depth of the social movement shaking the whole of France, there was a general tendency to exclude the king from all responsibility for the abuse of royal power, while at the same time demands were made for radical changes in the fixing and levying of taxes, on the question of property rights and the suppression of exemptions and privileges.

The King attempted to oppose the joint meeting of the three Orders¹ composing the State-General, but his "decisions" could not prevent the march of events in favour of the *Tiers Etat*, that is to say, in favour of the bourgeoisie who, in order to establish between men the relations of production which would correspond to the state of the productive forces of the time wanted to destroy everything in the old regime which constituted obstacles to the development of production and exchange (company freedom, wardenship, Customs, rights of lordship, etc.).

1 The Three Orders which made up the *Etats-Généraux* (States-General) were the nobility, the clergy and the *Tiers Etat* (Third Estate) made up of other excluded from the first two. Each constitutionally met separately.

It is known that on June 23rd, 1789, Louis XVI expressed his determination to maintain the distinction between the three Orders, declaring null the decisions taken by the deputies of the Third Estate. It is also known that in reply to the Marquis de Dreux-Breze, who intimated the order to the deputies to leave the assembly chamber, Bailly, President of the Assembly, replied: "It appears to me that the nation assembled cannot receive orders"—while Mirabeau gave his famous retort: "Go tell your master that we are here by decision of the people and will only leave at the point of bayonets."

Royal power had been checkmated. In the streets they cried: "Vive le Tiers" (Long live the Third Estate). The troops were no longer reliable, and the King, informed of the resistance of the Assembly, had no alternative but to say: "If they will not go they will remain."

This victory of the Assembly successively drew the majority of the clergy and a minority of the nobles to join the Third Estate. On June 27th, the King himself ordered his "loyal clergy" and his "loyal nobles" to take their place in the Assembly, which on July 9th took the title of Constituent Assembly.

Absolute monarchy had ceased to exist in France, but the royal family by no means accepted such a defeat.

The Count d'Artois, who later became Charles X, and the friends of Marie-Antoinette, planned to rid themselves of the Assembly by a *coup de force*. From June 30th foreign regiments and other corps of troops were brought to Paris. In this way twenty thousand men were concentrated around Paris and Versailles, while all sorts of rumours circulated about the dissolution of the Assembly and the arrest of the Deputies.

The Assembly, which on the proposal of Mirabeau, had requested the withdrawal of the troops, was met with a haughty refusal, and on the next day, Necker¹ was ordered to leave France without delay, which in the circumstances was a provocation.

It is easy to imagine the emotion that the dismissal of

1 Progressive Minister of Finance

Necker provoked amongst the popular masses who were haunted by the fear of a "Saint Bartholomew of Patriots."

Demonstrations of patriots took place throughout Paris. A foreign regiment, the "Royal German," charged the demonstrators, and the patriots called for arms. The French guards left their barracks and joined them.

Seeing the King using a foreign regiment against them, the people of Paris immediately took energetic measures. On July 13th the tocsin was rung at all the churches, processions armed with pikes and swords filed through the streets and demanded muskets. The electors of the Third Estate to the *States-General* met in the *Hotel de Ville* (Town Hall) and constituted, in common with the Bureau of the town which was composed of the merchants' provost and the aldermen, a Permanent Committee, which assumed municipal functions and was charged with organising a civic militia, which in a few hours had enrolled 12,000 men.

The following day the taking of the Bastille led to the capitulation of the King. On July 15th, in fact, Louis XVI himself announced the departure of the troops; on July 16th he recalled Nacker, on the 17th he went to the *Hotel de Ville* where he received a tricolour cockade. But meantime the princes and courtiers were taking the road of emigration to plot against the French Revolution.

The taking of the Bastille had been signal for uprisings in the provinces. Following the example of Paris, the provincial towns formed new municipalities and the militia was transformed into a National Guard.

The people rose against the farmer-generals, against the stewards, against the feudal lords. The armed peasants threw themselves on the *chateaux* and destroyed the deeds which laid down feudal rights in the purifying flames of fire.

It was in this atmosphere of demonstrations of force by the popular masses that the events of the night of August 4th took place. Several aristocratic deputies, wanting to ensure the "sacred right of property" against the popular movement, proposed to proclaim equality of taxation, the abolition of those feudal rights which constituted servitude

and a declaration that all other feudal rights were redeemable.

Until two o'clock in the morning the deputies voted on the suppression of statute-labour, hunting rights and other feudal dues, as well as the abolition of tithe and wardenship, town and individual privileges, the establishment of free courts of justice and the eligibility of every citizen to all posts. Confronted by the unleashed popular forces, the Constituent Assembly in a few hours had consecrated national unity and the downfall of the essential basis of the old regime.

On August 26th the Constituent Assembly voted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and increased its efforts to associate the King with its work. But Louis XVI never accepted anything until it was an accomplished fact, as he showed when he refused to sanction the decrees of August 4th and organised a demonstration against the Constituent Assembly by bringing in the Flanders Regiment as reinforcements at Versailles. On October 1st, 1789, the officers of this regiment were invited to a banquet at which the royal family was present. During the course of this banquet these officers cried: "Down with the coloured cockade! Let each take the black cockade (that of the Queen). That's the right one!" The news that the tricolour cockade had been trampled underfoot soon spread, and, as in July, the temper of the masses rose.

It was then, on October 5th, 1789, that 8,000 armed women left for Versailles, dragging cannons with them. They forced the King to return to Paris, where the Assembly rejoined him on October 16th.

The deputies were disturbed by the popular demonstrations which arose partly from the bad economic situation and hunger and partly from the fear that the revolutionary achievements already won might be destroyed. The Assembly dreaded sitting in the midst of the armed people of Paris, and on October 26th, 1789, decreed martial law, giving to the municipalities "the right to disperse riotous assemblage by force." Only two men came out against this decree: Robespierre at the rostrum of the Assembly and Marat in his paper, *L'Ami du Peuple* (The Friend of the People).

Following this, on the occasion of the celebration of the National Federation on July 14th, 1790, the King swore to

maintain the Constitution. This naturally gave birth to fresh illusions, and meantime the emigrants were plotting against France. The emigration had started on the morrow of the fall of the Bastille and continued during 1790, after the decree of the Assembly abolishing the rights of nobility, and also during 1791 after the flight of the King and his arrest at Varennes and subsequent suspension.

Numerous officers, who put their loyalty to the King before their loyalty to the nation, emigrated and went to Worms where the Prince of Conde had organized an army. The Count of Provence, the future Louis XVIII, a refugee in Coblenz, proclaimed himself regent during the "captivity" of his brother, and organized a government of which Calonne was the leader.

On their side the King and Queen plotted with friends abroad, and at the time popular opinion denounced the "Austrian Committee" sitting at the Tuileries.¹

The people of France were aware of the plots which were hatched against the nation, but far from being cast down by this, their patriotism was exalted and the King became more suspect.

At the beginning of 1792 new movements developed in the countryside; *chateaux* were burnt down and the peasants refused to pay feudal dues, which, though abolished, were still in fact being levied.

Naturally, the King pursuing his policy of duplicity, while adhering to the Constitution of 1791, explained at the same time to his brother, the Count of Provence, "that he had adhered solely out of fear of an 'incalculable storm' in the hope that the people would soon be disgusted with this absurd Constitution and would soon let him suppress it."

On July 25th, 1792, the Duke of Brunswick published his famous manifesto at the request of the Queen, Marie-Antoinette. This manifesto, in the names of the Emperor of Austria and the King of Prussia, contained the following threats:

"The said majesties declare, moreover, on their word of Emperor and King, that if the *Chateau des Tuileries* is forced

1 The Royal Palace in Paris.

or insulted, that if the least violence is committed against the King, the Queen and the Royal Family they will exact an exemplary and ever memorable vengeance by submitting the town of Paris to military execution and total submission."

Such threats spurred Paris and France in a magnificent outburst of feeling against the King, accomplice of foreign Powers, and the day of August 10th, with the taking of the Tuileries, was the reply of the people of Paris to the insolent diatribe of the Duke of Brunswick.

French royalty came to an end marked with the stamp of treason, while the people of France, with their army of "cobblers," was to inflict at Valmy the heaviest of defeats upon the emigrants and foreign troops, who had come to France convinced that their mere presence would suffice to vanquish.

After the heavy defeat which had been inflicted upon them, the traitors of Coblenz, who had thought it would be sufficient to appear in France to rout the arms of the Republic and arouse popular enthusiasm, attempted to obtain by conspiracy what they had not been able to obtain by force of arms—the crushing of the new revolutionary order.

Already on August 10th, 1792, the eve of the proclamation of the Republic, Marat had warned the people against the agents of the enemy, and wrote:

"I repeat, take heed of reaction, your enemies will not spare you if the dice comes back to them."

And he added:

"No one abhors the spilling of blood more than myself, but to prevent floods being shed, I think it is better to spill a few drops."

It is difficult not to think, when repeating these words, that if Franco and his accomplices had been tried and sentenced by the Spanish Republic prior to July 17th, 1936, the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent men, women, and children would have been avoided.

Marat gave proof at the same time of his clear-sightedness and courage in denouncing the foreign conspiracy against the nation, a conspiracy which was subsequently to be unmasked.

'The Count d'Antraigues was a sort of Minister of Police at Verone, at the side of the Count of Provence, having in France a network of police spies and informers. The police spies, thanks to corruption, penetrated everywhere, even into the offices of the Committee of Public Safety. Furthermore, the instructions given by the English Government to its emissaries were very precise. It was the task of the English agents to set fire to the arsenals, the fodder stores, etc. Moreover, these agents had been instructed to discredit the *assignat* (French paper money) and refuse any without the royal effigy.

It is easy to understand the object pursued by the enemies of France. In effect, the *assignats* were guaranteed by the estates of the Church, declared to be national property, to which later were added Crown lands and the estates of the emigrants.

This monetary system brought about a great change in property, and a considerable increase in the number of land-owners, which constituted a real revolution in land holdings, the consequences of which have never been effaced.

But if the agents of the Gestapo of the time worked actively in France, the enemies of the Revolution spread their network of corruption and provocation. The banker Perregeaux, whom Bonaparte was later to make a senator, Comander of the Legion d'Honneur and regent of the Bank of France, ensured the liaison between the English Government and those who were called the *pourris* (rotten).

This same English Government, which was prudent in the matter of direct intervention in the country, but in favour of the formation of a "Fifth Column," was behind the uprisings which took place in the West of France. The leaders of these uprisings were financially and politically supported by the English Government.

Moreover, the War of Vendee was added to the war against the foreign Powers which the young Republic had to face. Whilst the situation in the departments had perhaps made the formation of a "royal Catholic army" easier than elsewhere, nevertheless the hand of the foreign Powers can be seen in the revolt against the Republican power.

The foreign conspiracy had to find support in France. This they did by corrupting men who, after having served the Republic for a time and up to a certain stage of its development, did not hesitate to come to terms with foreign reaction.

"During the months of July and August, 1793, at the time of the great internal and external perils, the existence of a group of business men which was attempting to seize the reins of government so as to be able to speculate at their ease was denounced to the Jacobins, and soon after was denounced from the rostrum of the Convention. It was added that these business men, who penetrated into all the committees and everywhere where there was power to be exercised and a profit to be made, not only had in mind making a fortune, but received inspiration from 'foreign agents', agents of Pitt and of Cobourg, and that through them these agents were preparing the re-establishment of the monarchy."¹

Names of "rotten" parliamentarians in contact with foreign agents were whispered. Their criminal activity soon became common knowledge amongst the people and brought those guilty of it before the tribunals.

While Delaunay, deputy of Angers, speculated in stocks of the *Compagnie des Indes*, which had been purchased by the State at great expense (as those of the *Compagnie Transatlantique* have in our own time), Fabre d'Eglantine, deputy and poet, was stock-jobbing with Delaunay, and at the same time sold shoddy boots to the Army in order to pay his debts and to support the actress Caroline Remy or la Moreney.

During this period (as in fact today) women played a very important role in the corruption and conspiracies which the First Republic had to suffer. The unscrupulous contractor, ex-Abbe d'Espagnac, lover of the former Countess of Beauhôrte, had as protector a stock-jobbing deputy named Julien de Toulouse.

The former friar Chabot, who had become a deputy, took for wife the sister of the brothers Frey, Austrian bankers and ex-contractors of the Emperor Joseph II, who, with the

¹ *La Corruption Parlementaire sous la Terreur*, by Albert Mathiez.

connivance of the "rotten" had become contractors and bankers of the Republic. The deputy Basire, a friend of Chabot and lover of the Baroness Palm d'Aelders, an adventuress who was in receipt of a pension from the Dutch Government, also figured among the corrupt.

Courtois, compatriot of Danton and deputy of Aube, who supplied beef to the Army without fulfilling the terms of the contracts, maintained a very close relationship with the Duchess of Choiseul.

Among the "rotten" we should further name Riviere and Poultier, who took national property during their mission to Vaucluse; Barras and Freron, who in Marseilles appropriated furniture and silver belonging to the former nobility; there was Tallien, lover and later husband of Theresa Cabarras, daughter of a Spanish banker and former Marquise of Fontenay; there was the citizen of Liege, Robert, deputy for Paris, who paid his debts with rum he had confiscated; there was Herault de Sechelles, former protege of Marie-Antoinette, whom his colleagues of the Committee of Public Safety suspected of being in the pay of foreign Powers.

Danton was the rabid defender of these "rotten," and he himself did not escape suspicion and was accused of having become a rich property-owner in Aube and Paris, while prior to 1789 he had nothing.

Alongside the corrupt, making use of them, contributing to the corruption, were the direct agents of the foreign Powers: Pereira, Dubuisson, the Belgian Proli, Desfieux, the brothers Frey and their main collaborator, the Dane, Diedrichsen. There were also the Spanish grandee, Guzman, banker and intriguer; the Prussian, Baron Trenck; the English banker, Boyd, accused of corresponding with Pitt, and also the Baron de Batz.

It was in the midst of this treason and corruption that the Committee of Public Safety, led by the Jacobins Robespierre and Saint-Just, had to take extreme measures to defend the Republic. In this connection, Lenin has defined the achievements of the Jacobins:

"The bourgeois historians see in Jacobinism a downfall. The proletarian historians regard Jacobinism as the greatest

expression of an oppressed class in its struggle for liberation. The Jacobins gave France the best models of a democratic revolution; they repelled in an exemplary fashion the coalition of monarchs formed against the Republic. The Jacobins were not destined to win a complete victory, chiefly because eighteenth-century France was surrounded on the Continent by countries that were too backward, and also because France itself was not possessed of the material requisites for Socialism, since there were no banks, no capitalist syndicates, no machine industry, no railroads.

“‘Jacobinism’ in Europe or on the boundary line between Europe and Asia in the twentieth century would be the rule of the revolutionary class, of the proletariat, which, supported by the poorest peasants and relying on the presence of the material requisites for an advance towards Socialism, could not only achieve the same great, ineradicable, unforgettable things that were achieved by the Jacobins of the eighteenth century, but could also lead to a permanent triumph of the toilers on a universal scale.

“It is natural for the bourgeoisie to hate Jacobinism. It is natural for the petty bourgeoisie to fear it. The class-conscious workers and toilers have faith in the transfer of power to the revolutionary oppressed class, for that is the essence of Jacobinism, and it is the only escape from the present crisis, the only way of stopping economic disintegration and the war.”¹

The French Revolution was also to know the treason of its generals, starting with Dumouriez, officer of the old regime, bought by Louis XVI, and an opponent of the new ideas and of the social changes that had come from the Revolution.

Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Girondin Cabinet in 1792, he attempted to precipitate the march of events which were to result in war, for not only was this the desire of the King, but it was also his own adventurer’s plan, because he hoped to gain advantage from the war.

He was commanding the army of the Republic at Valmy on September 20th, 1792, and instead of taking advantage of the victory that was gained, he negotiated with

¹ Lenin: *Collected Works*, Vol. xx, Part 2, p. 278.

the Prussians, interrupted hostilities, and allowed the Prussians to retreat without organizing their pursuit. A few weeks later, on November 20th, 1792, the proof of the corruption of Dumouriez, and also that of Mirabeau, was discovered behind a secret panel in the Tuileries.

Dumouriez had among his friends the well-known corrupter, ex-Abbe d'Espagnac, and he had been allowing irregular transactions, which also branded him as one involved in corruption.

Accused before the Committee of Public Safety of pursuing in Belgium and Holland a personal policy contrary to the interests of the Republic, Dumouriez was defended by Danton, who stated:

A portrait of Dumouriez is visible in the background of this section, appearing as a faint watermark.

"He does not respect the Convention, which he calls a mob of ignoramuses and scoundrels. But he is our only man of war. Let us keep him, but at the same time watch him."

On April 1st, 1793, four representatives and the Minister of War went to the armies to inform Dumouriez that he was relieved of his command, and asked him: "Do you want to imitate La Fayette, whom you so roundly condemned?" To which the General replied: "I disobey, but I only disobey tyranny."

The representatives and the Minister were handed over to the Austrians, but, thanks to the action of representatives of the Convention who were at Lille and Valenciennes, the soldiers did not follow their traitor general, who finished his life in receipt of a pension from the English Government.

Another general, Custine, who also plotted against the Convention and negotiated with Prussia, was unmasked, arrested, and sentenced to death on August 27th, 1793.

General Houchard, who, thanks to his collaborators Jourdain and Hoche, repulsed the Austrians in the Battle of Hondschoote, but refused to go over to the offensive when he had been ordered to do so, was also sentenced to death and executed.

It is necessary to mention also how the officers suspected of treachery were dealt with at the time of war with Spain. In December, 1793, the Spanish armies occupied Collioure

and Port-Vendres. The problem which had to be solved was whether it would be possible to bar the road to Languedoc to the nation's enemies.

The Convention, having some reason to doubt the Republican loyalty of its generals, sent two representatives to the armies, Milhoud and Soubiran, who on January 11th, 1794, set up a revolutionary military tribunal. This tribunal sentenced to death General Ramel (for having given up Port-Vendres), Generals Bernede and Gignoux (guilty of grave negligence), Lieutenant-Colonel de Guerard de Montarnal de la Prade, and Captain de la Croix de Plainpal (as counter-revolutionaries and royalists). There were also brought before the revolutionary tribunal General Delattre, who had abandoned Collioure, the former chief-in-command of the West, who had left Collioure without supplies, and the former Marquis Chaillet de Verges, Brigadier-General.

After these cleansings, confidence spread anew in the hearts of the troops and on May 1st, 1794, the Spanish armies were thrown out of the territories of the French Republic.

But Custine, Houchard, and the treacherous generals of the army of the Pyrenees were not the only ones to be subjected the rigours of revolutionary justice. Long is the list of officers who, found guilty of treason or sabotage, were sentenced and executed by order of the nation, in a state of legitimate defence.

Further, a member of the Convention, demanding the cleansing of the military cadres, said with point: "The *sans-culottess*¹ who will be placed at the head of the armies are maybe a little less educated, and will perhaps make a few mistakes, but they will not betray."

Speaking of the role of a general, Marie-Joseph Chenier said to the Convention: "When public safety is in question, it is only necessary for a general to be suspected for him to be removed. He can do no good if he has not the confidence of the public."

If in 1939 the full light was turned on the conspiracy from abroad against our country and against liberty, there

¹ "Without breeches," arising from the fact that the common people did not wear breeches like the aristocracy. Savetier (cobbler, or in slippers) was another term used in an attempt to belittle and ridicule the mass of the supporters of the Revolution.

would be great surprise at some of those who would be exposed. Through hatred of progress, through hatred of the people, there are Frenchmen who are ready to-day to repeat the gesture of the Mayor of Saint-Mihiel, who, on September 3rd, 1792, welcomed as "a friend of order and peace" the army of the Duke of Brunswick, and pointed out for his vengeance the houses of the patriots faithful to the programme of national salvation.

As for us Communists, the example of struggle of the French Revolution against the traitors and conspirators in the pay of foreign Powers gives us lessons of optimism and courage which derive from the famous slogan of Danton: "Audacity, more audacity, and always audacity."

We also bear in mind the example of incorruptibility given by Robespierre, and at a time when so many are involved in more or less shady affairs, in a situation when corruption has become practically the normal thing for certain people, our Communist Party find its strength in the moral integrity and self-denial of its militants. And, finally, we bear in mind on the basis of the struggle conducted by the French Revolution against the conspirators from abroad, the necessity of rousing the whole nation against the policy of capitulation to international Fascism which organizes its "Fifth Column" within our frontiers.

In this connection, Farinnacci, member of the Fascist Grand Council, wrote in the *Regime Fascista* of May 28th, 1939:

"If our advice can be of use to those of our compatriots who are the most attached to the mother country, we give it to them with the utmost will, and this is what it is: pretend to agree and at the opportune moment provoke disorder in the ranks, of the enemy. Hundreds of men firing in the backs of the combatants obtain better results than thousands of soldiers in the front line. All is fair in war. . . ."

In fighting against the treacherous "Fifth Column" which continues the criminal work of the traitors of

Coblenz, the Communists remain faithful to the teaching of their forefathers of the Revolution. At a time when so many gossips and cowards speak of Jacobinism, the facts show that the Jacobins have as heirs the Communists, who fight under the banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin for the liberation and emancipation of humanity.

NOTE.—Too little is known of the facts relative to the emigration during the French Revolution. In this connection, reference can usefully be made to the list of emigrants published by the Administration of the National Estates in 1794 at the Musée de l'Histoire, Parc de Montreau.

In this list, made up of three volumes with a total of more than 1,000 pages, are to be found the names of more than 33,000 noblemen, high Church dignitaries, big land-owners, and big bourgeois who emigrated during the Revolution.

Many of these names are the same as those borne to-day by the potentates of big capital and the supporters of Fascism in our country. Amongst others are found six times the name of Clermont-Tonnerre; five times the name of Isnard; eight times the names of the counts, dukes, and equerries de Polignac; seven times the name of Montaigut; four times the name of Moustier; fourteen times the name of Montalembert; three times the name of St. Pern; once the name of Grandmaison. One also finds the names of Verne, Mallet, Schneider, Tardieu, and Flandin.

Finally, in the list of traitors of Coblenz, the name of de la Rocque appears forty times.

“A tout seigneur, tout honneur.”

THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE JACOBINS

By Gabriel Peri¹

Vice-President Of The Foreign Commission
Of The Chamber Of Deputies

I

ON May 22nd, 1790, the Constituent Assembly proclaimed:

"The French nation renounces any intention of embarking on wars with a view to conquest and will not employ force against the liberty of any people."

Five years later France signed the Treaty of Basle with Prussia and Spain, and the Treaty of the Hague with Holland. By the first France obtained possession of Belgium and of the left bank of the Rhine. Spain ceded the West-Indian port of Saint Dominique. Holland—the Batavian Republic—opened the Scheldt to French commerce and ceded to France the whole left bank of the Meuse.

In this way France enlarged her territory. She pushed her frontiers to the Rhine. But the Rhine itself was passed. Kehl, facing Strasbourg, was occupied. The Batavian Republic became a mere dependency of the French Republic.

Between these two events, the proclamation of peace to

1 Shot by the Germans as a hostage on December 15th, 1941, after many efforts through torture and bribes to make him renounce his principles. In his last letter he wrote:

"Let my friends know that I have remained faithful to the ideals of my life. Let my compatriots know that I am going to die so that France shall live. I have made a last examination of my conscience. It is positive. It is this that I would like you to repeat to all around: I would go the same road if I had my life to live again. I think all the time this night that my dear Paul Vaillant-Couturier was right in saying that Communism is the youth of the world and that it prepares 'morrows of song.' I am going straightway to prepare those 'morrows of songs.' I feel myself strong to face death. Farewell, so that France shall live."

the world by the Constituent Assembly and the treaties of territorial expansion, five years had elapsed—the fullest and most tumultuous years of Europe's history.

What motives inspired this foreign policy in the men of the Great Revolution? How did they pass from the declaration of May, 1790, to the treaties of 1795? In other words, what was the diplomacy of Revolutionary France?

In the spring of 1789, Europe, or at least Western Europe, seemed far from war. The Emperor of Austria, the King of Prussia, and the Empress of Russia were absorbed in Eastern affairs. The second wanted compensation in Poland for the gains of the others from Turkey. When a few months later the Count d'Artois solicited the aid of the Emperor of Austria against the revolutionaries, the monarch reprimanded him and advised him to submit.

But time went by. The outlines of the Revolution became more precise, and on the other side of the frontiers covetous desires took shape. From its inception, the Revolution had a universal character which it did not try to disguise. Its example was contagious. In June, 1790, the population of Avignon rose against their sovereign, the Pope. A popular assembly decided on September 14th, 1791, to become part of France. In the valley of the Rhine the peasants and the bourgeois expressed their sympathy with the Revolution. The monarchs became alarmed. As early as September, 1790, the King of Prussia mooted to the Emperor of Austria the project of intervening in France.

II

When Alsace became French in 1648, treaties had confirmed to its German princes their rights of lordship, on the basis of which, after having sworn loyalty to the King of France, they collected their feudal rents. The Constituent Assembly abolished these feudal rights, breaking down this edifice.

"Of what concern to the people of Alsace, or to the people of France, are treaties which in days of despotism aimed at uniting one despot to others?" asked Merlin of Douai. "It was not by these treaties that the union came

about. The people of Alsace were united to the people of France because such was their desire. Their determination alone consummated and legalized the union."

To which Schubart added: "To become French in this way is the greatest benefit which can be imagined by a German, who, while imagining he was free, had the despot's whip cracking behind him."

The princes, however, protested. They turned from Versailles to Prussia, which urged them to recapture Alsace, posing as the protector of Germanic liberties.

Furthermore, the emigrant army was assembling in the Electorate of Treves. The Constituent Assembly, and later the Legislative, requested the Emperor to order them to disperse. Emperor Leopold agreed to send an invitation to this effect to the Elector of Treves, whose reply was ambiguous. Also, as Robespierre showed in his speech in January, 1792, the court desired war. Baron de Breteuil, who directed the secret diplomacy of Louis XVI, was pressing for it. In the Legislative, Bressot and Vergniaud moved in the same direction. Meantime, Leopold died suddenly. His son, who succeeded him, called upon the French Government to repress in France "what can give cause of alarm to other States."

The note was date April 15th, 1792. Five days later the Legislative declared war on the head of the House of Austria, whom it called the "King of Bohemia and Hungary." However, since February 7th an alliance had united the King of Prussia and the Emperor of Austria. France was therefore at grips with Austria and Prussia.

The war started with a series of disasters. Longwy and Verdun capitulated. On September 12th the Prussians entered Champagne. On September 20th the Battle of Valmy saved the nation. A month later the Prussians recrossed the frontier and on all fronts the French armies went over to the offensive.

During this phase of the war, England did not participate. The Count Saint Martin-de-Front, Ambassador of Savoy in London, informed his Court that England "would limit its action to secret manœuvres to sustain disunity and perpetuate anarchy." Pitt had his eyes fixed on the Netherlands. "England desires the Netherlands to remain Aus-

trian because they are the link which binds England to the Continent," declared Lord Grenville on May 25th, 1792. Talleyrand obtained from the Cabinet in London an undertaking that they would not declare war so long as the southern provinces of Belgium alone were in the balance and the French armies did not threaten either Belgium or Holland.

After the victory of Jemmapes, which drove the Austrians out of Belgium, the Convention proclaimed that it would give "help and fraternity to all people who wished to recover their freedom." On December 15th, 1792, it decreed that in all countries occupied by the French armies feudal rights, titles, and all privileges, were abolished and that "all properties belonging to the prince and his satellites, to lay and to religious communities, would be placed in the safe-keeping of the Republic." Conquest commenced. Danton, returning from Belgium, pronounced the prophetic phrase: "Our frontiers are defined by Nature." To a deputy who shouted, "No conquests," he replied: "The conquests of reason."

On January 31st he defined this policy more precisely: "It is vain to fear that too much scope is being given to the Republic. Its limits are defined by Nature. We will await them all, from the four corners of Europe, from the direction of the Rhine, from the direction of the ocean, from the direction of the Alps."

III

The great struggle against Europe began, against England especially. Jaurès describes Europe at the end of 1792, when the Second Coalition against Revolutionary France was being organized, thus:

"Everywhere, at the end of 1792, the world was organizing surreptitiously against the Revolution. It had been shaken, but was struggling to stifle by force the thoughts and admirable beginnings which the Revolution had inspired throughout the world. The universal conscience, for a time attracted and captivated, was contracting, was retreating, was arming itself with distrust, with jealousy, with fear."

England would not allow France to extend to the mouth of the Scheldt. Pitt, the Prime Minister, proclaimed that it would be a "war of extermination." In fact, it lasted twenty-two years.

Between 1793 and 1795 France confronted a general coalition. It was attacked within the frontiers by the rebellion of Vendee. It was again saved by prodigious revolutionary energy. The road to Paris was cleared after the victory of Carnot and Jourdain at Wattignies. Alsace was delivered after the victory of Hoche at Weissenburg. Belgium was reconquered. Peace was signed at Basle and the Hague. The coalition broke up. The France of the Directory only had to face Austria, to which, after the campaign of Napoleon Bonaparte in Italy, it dictated the Treaty of Campo Formio.

On two occasions, when France was invaded, political preoccupations in the East helped to weaken the force of the invaders. After Valmy it was preoccupation with Polish affairs which constrained Friedrich Wilhelm II to abandon the Coalition. At the beginning of 1793 the King of Prussia was forced to transfer the main bulk of his troops to the Vistula. Catherine II of Russia did not intervene against the Revolution because, as she said, her soldiers had to bring to reason "the Jacobins of Poland." The heroic resistance of Poland diverted the armies of the Central Powers from the Rhine and contributed to saving France from invasion.

IV

During these trials, what guiding line inspired the men of the Revolution in their relations with Europe? "The French Revolution has shaken the world," declared Robespierre on November 18th, 1793. What was the scope and intensity of this impact? And what were its limits?

The intellectual ferment of France and her philosophers of the eighteenth century had immense repercussions in Germany. The opinion expressed by Schubart when France incorporated Alsace has already been quoted. Schubart considered it as the greatest honour of his life when he was

invited by the revolutionaries of Strasbourg to the celebrations of *Fraternity* on July 14th, 1790. Forster also pleaded in moving terms for reunion with France. He attempted to dispel the uneasiness and suspicions which had arisen with the memories of the occupation of the Palatinate. "What advantage would you gain by remaining apart from the Revolution," he asked, "since it is with its aid that you can become free citizens?" Pestalozzi resolutely sided with the Revolution. "Let the heads of kings fall," he wrote, "if the royal blood spilt in this way calls the attention of the people to the rights of man." Fichte wrote: "The French Revolution is a powerful painting on the theme: the rights of man and human dignity."

It also penetrated into England. Mackintosh became enthusiastic about the *assignats*. "The radiance of this frothing flood of fictive richness is only a reflection of the real richness of France, animated and inflamed by the Revolution." He attacked the oligarchic control of representation in the Commons and supported the demand for universal suffrage. Thomas Paine wrote his book, *The Rights of Man*, once the "Bible of English radicalism." Fox extolled in the Commons the courage of the fighters of July 14th. "I believe," he stated, "that the new Government of France is good because it tends to make happy those subjected to it. I have to state that I admire the Constitution of France."

The poets gave free rein to their glee. Burns sang the tree of liberty. Coleridge wrote his *Ode to France*. Wordsworth lived in Paris through the great revolutionary days.

And the impact did not spare Switzerland, neighbour of France. Between Geneva and Grenoble communications did not cease. The liberal agitation of Dauphiny and its States had its echoes in Geneva. The bourgeois of the town demanded a popular constitution and the election of the *Petit-Conseil* (Small Council) by the people. The peasantry addressed a petition to the "magnificent lordships" of Geneva for equal civil and political rights. They demanded the suppression of the feudal regime.

In this way enthusiasm and liberty were contagious. The French Revolution excited great hopes in the people.

It won the adherence of the oppressed. Avignon, Franche-Comte, Savoy, and Nice voluntarily merged with France. The French revolutionaries, the friends of the people, expressed the desire that all nations should follow their example.

But why was the example not followed? Why did it not lead to the overthrow of thrones? Why was it that the French Revolution, friend of the people, found itself from the spring of 1792 at grips with a Coalition of Europe?

V

Let us try to answer this double query by tracing in the two principal countries of Europe the limits of the revolutionary impact.

Despite the boldness of the German thinkers, their adherence to the great ideas of the Encyclopædist, and the cordiality with which they greeted the Revolution, Germany in 1792 was not ripe for revolution.

Jaures, in his *Socialist History of the French Revolution*, enumerated some of the reasons for this. Germany was divided into a hundred small states, and these political divisions rendered a general movement difficult. Germany in 1791-2 lacked any degree of unified national life. The national consciousness did not possess a political centre, and this was a result of the rival intrigues of Austria and Prussia, each of which was trying to dominate the country. The productive power of Germany shattered in the Thirty Years' War, still lagged behind. Hence, unlike the French bourgeoisie, the German bourgeoisie was weak and incapable of social initiative. Marx and Engels noted in the *Communist Manifesto* that the insufficiency of German economic life rendered impossible any really substantial extension of the French Revolution to Germany.

In England too, for very different reasons, despite the warm welcome given to the initiative shown by the French Revolution, its impact did not provoke any profound and decisive transformation. A certain number of the economic and social reforms demanded by the people of France had already been more or less completely realized on the other

side of the Channel. Apart from the Scottish Highlands, the feudal system had been almost eliminated. Equal liability to taxation had been partly realized. No customs barriers hindered the circulation of goods within the country. The English industrial and commercial bourgeoisie were endowed with all the necessary organs for capitalist growth. It had companies, monopolies, and an immense field of exploitation in the colonies. It controlled the Budget. It wielded a decisive influence in Parliament. Finally, the structure of English industry, despite the progress of the manufacturing system, was still too complicated for any general demand of the proletarians, such as the right of combination, to be possible.

In France, the deficit had forced royalty to call the *States-General*. In England, the Pitt Government was preparing the era of surplus value and reduced taxation. In France, the proletariat grew suddenly during the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolutionary class. In England, the compromise between the landed aristocracy and the commercial and manufacturing bourgeoisie left no room for any proletarian political development. Moreover, the great majority of English workers were tied to the political and social system by the relative benefits they were drawing from industrial expansion.

Generally, the unequal political, economic, and social conditions prevented the "revolutionization" of Europe. The revolutionary contagion was undeniable. Directly or indirectly, it exercised an influence on the people which was deep and lasting. In time the Revolution marked with its stamp the evolution of Europe. But for the reasons given the revolutionary impact did not bring about "the fraternal embrace of all the peoples of Europe delivered from despotism." On the other hand, as Robespierre declared, "the forward rush of a great people to liberty was bound to displease the kings who surrounded it." But, as he added "there was a great distance between this secret disposition and the perilous decision to declare war on the French people."

VI

What was necessary for the gap to be bridged? Robespierre enumerated the reasons: the complicity of the King of France, the treason of the factions, and the intrigues of Austria and England. Let us stop at the first of these reasons. It will permit the study of the foreign policy of which Robespierre was the champion. Two speeches make his theses clear. One was made on January 11th, 1792, a few weeks before the declaration of war against the King of Bohemia and Hungary. 'War,' asked Robespierre. "I wonder who proposes it, in what circumstances, and why?" We must admire the clarity of these questions. For the Jacobin speaker, war was just or unjust. Would the war proposed by Brissot be a just war? Here is his reply:

"You have yourselves agreed that the war suited the emigrants, suited the Government, the intriguers of the Court, that numerous faction whose leaders, too well known, have been directing for a long time all the measures of the executive power: all the trumpets of the aristocracy and the Government give the same signal; finally, if anyone could think that the conduct of the Court has not always been in opposition to the principles of equality and the respect of the rights of the people, he would, if he was of good faith, be regarded as insane; anyone who said that the Court proposed a measure as decisive as war without relating it to its plan, would give an equally disadvantageous idea of his judgement; therefore, can you say that it is a matter of indifference to the well-being of the State that the undertaking of a war is directed by the love of liberty or by the spirit of despotism, by loyalty or by perfidy?"

And further:

"Is it the people and the spirit of liberty which directs the plan proposed to us? It is the Court, it is the officers, it is its ministers. You always forget that it is this fact which changes all the contrivances. Do you think that it is the intention of the Court to shake the throne of Leopold and those of all the kings who in reply to its messages give evidence of exclusive attachment—the

Court which ceaselessly preaches to you respect for foreign governments, which by its dealings has disturbed the revolution of Brabant?.....”

And finally:

“ The most extravagant idea which can be born in the head of a politician is to think that it is sufficient for a people to appear, with arms in their hands, before a foreign people, to have their laws and their constitution adopted. No one likes armed missionaries; and the first counsel which nature and prudence would give would be to reject them as enemies. I have said that such an invasion would awaken memories of the conflagration in the Palatinate and of the late wars much readily than it would sow the idea of our Constitution; because the mass of the people of these countries are better acquainted with these facts than they are with our Constitution. The reports of well-informed men who know them deny all we are told about the ardour with which they sigh for our Constitution and our armies. Before the effects of our Revolution are felt by foreign countries it must be consolidated.”

It was against the advice of Robespierre and the Jacobins that war was declared on Austria in April, 1792.

A year later, after Jemmapes, after the decrees of December 15th, 1792, it was again against the advice of Robespierre that war was declared on England.

Here are the terms in which Robespierre, in his report to the Convention, later judged the event:

“ The time had arrived when the British Government after having incited so many enemies against us, had decided openly to enter the plot; but public opinion and the opposition party were upsetting the Government plan. Brissot declared war; at the same time it was declared against Holland; at the same time it was declared against Spain, because we were in no way prepared to fight against these new enemies, and because the Spanish fleet was ready to join with the English fleet.

"With what cowardly hypocrisy the traitors made play with the supposed insults to our envoys, which had been contrived in advance between them and the foreign powers! With what audacity did they invoke that dignity of the nation with which they were insolently trifling! The cowards! They had saved the Prussian despot and his army; they had soaked the soil of Belgium with the purest French blood and had flung the unhappy Belgians into the arms of their tyrants; they had delivered to our enemies our treasures, our supplies, our arms and our defenders; on their support, and proud of so many crimes, the vile Dumouriez had dared to threaten freedom in its own sanctuary. . . . *O patrie!* What guardian deity has been able to snatch you from the immense abyss dug to engulf you in these days of crime and calamity, in which, plotting with your innumerable enemies, your ingrate sons plunged their murderous hands into your breast and seemed to contend for your scattered members, to deliver them, bloody, to the ferocious tyrants conspiring against you; in those ghastly days when virtue was proscribed, perfidy crowned, and calumny triumphant, when your ports, your fleet, your armies, your fortresses, your administrators, your envoys—all were sold to your enemies! It was not enough to have the armed tyrants against us; they wanted to doom the nation to hatred and render the Revolution hideous in the eyes of the universe."

Condemnation without qualification, of what Jaures called revolutionary imperialism. Robespierre denounced it as favouring the intrigues of the despots. He did not want liberty to be carried on the point of bayonets. He feared, with what foresight, the words which half a century later the German, Herwegh, was to pronounce against France: "We do not want freedom from foreigners. We do not want this sweetheart, whom the soldiers of France have held in their arms before bringing her to us."

VII

But how did the Revolution carry out this imperialism which Robespierre so rightly denounced? What were the

necessities for conquest? Contrary to the prophecies of the Gironde, the people did not rise with the arrival of the soldiers of the Revolution. France promised protection to those who fought for liberty. But how was this protection to be exercised? How shelter the revolutionary minority from blows? Cambon expressed himself in the following terms at the end of the year 1792:

"Seeing that the people to whom the armies of the Republic brought freedom have not the necessary experience to establish their rights, it becomes necessary for us to decree revolutionary power and to destroy the old regime which holds them enslaved. . . ."

Was not annexation the best protection to give to those in revolt? The Abbe Gregoire proposed the annexation of Savoy. Brissot dreamed of an expedition to Spain. The ideal of liberty became charged with aggressiveness. It became a diplomatic instrument. It served to justify annexation and the placing of countries under tribute. Danton spoke of natural frontiers. The red cap was placed on the old policy of Richelieu.

The Gironde's policy of social conservatism was not divorced from its diplomatic preoccupations. The Gironde was afraid of peace, because it was afraid of the people in arms. "They will return to cut our throats," declared Roland.

Robespierre's passionate criticism was therefore well-founded. France lost her freedom, because she was unable to prevent herself from acting against the freedom of other peoples. The error can be explained by the uneven development of capitalism. It was impossible for the Revolution to have a passive foreign policy. Why did it not take counsel from the wise advice of Maximilien and adapt its foreign policy to this unequal development which made the soldiers of the Revolution appear so different to different countries, and made so diverse the tone of the popular consultations which ended in the annexation of the Rhine country, Savoy, and Nice?

It was not their activity with which Robespierre reproached the Gironde, and he himself could not be accused

of passivity. But amongst the men of the Revolution the Jacobins alone saw that the state of Europe made essential a policy which combined firmness and realism; that the diplomacy of the Revolution must neither favour coalitions against France, nor contribute to turn away from France the peoples aspiring towards freedom. It was because the lesson preached by Robespierre was not heeded that a day came when the peoples invoked French ideas against France herself.

It is true that the aggressiveness of England was strengthened by the criminal policy of the Gironde, by its incapacity to follow a policy likely to maintain the enthusiasm which in the first hours had stirred so many English citizens in favour of the Revolution—to detach skilfully the English people from the Court of St. James—to show to the English people that their interests and their future demanded friendship with France. Robespierre was nearly alone in attempting to demonstrate this, to condemn the spectacular demonstrations which had been stirred up by the counter-revolutionary fury of England. Nevertheless, the hostility of England was in origin much more profound, and it would be illusory to deny this. It arose from the fact that English capitalism was much more developed than French capitalism. The Anglo-French Commercial Treaty of 1786 was an affirmation on England's part of a determination to expand. Robespierre himself described how the minister of George III (Pitt) wanted to secure for England Toulon, Dunkirk, and the French colonies: "It was a question, said the representative of England, of reducing France to political nullity."

"Master of Dunkirk, of Toulon, of the colonies," Robespierre further said "the English Government would soon have forced America to submit to the domination of George. It is to be noted that the Cabinet conducted at the same time in France and in the United States two parallel intrigues tending to the same goal. While it attempted to divide the South of France from the North, it plotted to detach the Northern provinces of America from the Southern provinces; and as they attempt to-day to federalize our Republic, so they work in Philadelphia to break the links of the confederation which unites the different portions of the American Republic."

The Continent was threatened with becoming a semi-colony of England. It was because the French Revolution achieved French unity, national emancipation, and the conditions for the development of French markets and industry that England utilised all the feudal forces of the Continent against her.

VIII

The speech of Robespierre from which the greater part of the extracts have been taken, because it propounds in the fullest manner the doctrine of the foreign policy of the Jacobins, was made on November 18th, 1793. It had great repercussions in France and in Europe. This report, *On the Political Situation of the Republic*, was presented a month before the victories of Hoche which freed Alsace, and a month before the rebellion of Vendee. Robespierre was assassinated (July 27th, 1794) a month after the Battle of Fleurus, as a result of which Pichegru forced the passage of the Sambre and opened the road to the conquest of Holland. The annexationist treaties of Basle and the Hague were not the work of the Montagnards. When they were negotiated Thermidorian reaction was already victorious in Paris.

The proclamation of Robespierre was an act of faith in the destiny of the Republic. He declared to the members of the Convention:

“If France were crushed the political world would crumble.

“If liberty perished in France, the whole of Nature would be covered with a funeral veil, and human reason would retreat to the abyss of ignorance and barbarity. Europe would be the prey of two or three brigands who would avenge humanity only by making war, and of whom the most ferocious, by crushing his rivals, would bring us back to the reign of the Huns and Tartars. After such a great example and so many fruitless efforts, who would ever again declare war on tyranny? Despotism, like a sea without banks, would flood the whole world's surface and would soon cover the heights of the political world where rests the ark which contains the charts of humanity. The earth would be but a heritage of crime; and the betrayal of our generous efforts would

justify once again the reproach brought by all magnanimous hearts against the supporters of Brutus: 'Oh virtue! they would be able to shout, 'you are but a vain name'.'

After a century and a half, these words have not lost their freshness. The victory of a proletarian revolution in 1917 throws still more into relief this Jacobin teaching. Against the Soviet Revolution, like the French Revolution, was incited the hatred of the old world. Like the French Revolution, it has aroused the enthusiasm of the oppressed. Like it also, it repulsed the invaders.

The orator of the Committee of Public Safety who addressed the Convention on November 18th, 1793, was to be swept away on July 27th, 1794, by Thermidor. The Bolsheviks, however, cushed the Trotskyist imitators of Thermidorian reaction. They have protected their diplomacy from Girondin extravagances. Strong in an Army inspired by the popular spirit, which also inspired the Army of the Revolution, the Jacobins of our epoch, friends and allies of the peoples who are victims of aggression and who defend the independence of their country, have once and for all announced to the world their policy of peace: "The Soviets do not covet an inch of foreign soil; they will not cede an inch of Soviet territory."

THE FINANCES OF THE REVOLUTION

*By Jacques Solomon*¹

Doctor Of Science

I

IT is impossible to examine the financial achievement of the Revolution without examining, at least briefly, the financial situation and the system of taxation in 1789.

The direct taxes numbered three: *taille*, *capitation* and *vingtièmes*.

The *taille* was an assessment tax; each year the King fixed the sum he wished to raise; this was then apportioned among the taxpayers, in principle according to their incomes. But the "privileged"—the nobility and the clergy—were exempt. Moreover, method of assessment was most arbitrary; in a given village the rate of assessment might vary from one to four.

The *capitation* was originally a tax on income. At its institution (1695), those subjected to it were divided into twenty-two classes. The first included only the Dauphin, who paid 2,000 *livres*² (French pounds) per year; the twenty-second, the least rich, only 1 *livre* per year. But later it simply became a tax assessment supplementary to the *taille*. True, the "privileged" were not exempt in principle. But the clergy commuted its *capitation* of 4 million *livres* a year by a lump payment of 24 millions. As to the nobility, "it is proved by precise evidence that the great nobles and princes of the blood in practice evaded this tax by lying returns which tax collectors and controllers general of the finances dared not contest."

1 Shot as a hostage by the Nazis.

2 The *livre* (divided into 20 *sols*), worth approximately a franc (4 grms. 5 silver). As an example only, the daily wage of a Parisian worker was 2 *livres*.

The *vingtièmes* was also a kind of income tax. It derived its name from the fact that at its inception it was levied on an assessed twentieth of the income; later several twentieths were imposed. This tax affected income from land, industry, and commerce alike, but in practice it bore essentially on the income from land: 74 millions out of 76,500.000 which the tax yielded in 1784. The clergy commuted its *vingtièmes* in 1710 for the modest lump sum of 8 millions.

Thus, in practice, all direct taxation fell on the peasants, the artisans, and the townspeople generally. The great estates of the nobility and the Church were not touched. For example, Francois de Neufchateau drew up for the taxpayers of his bailiwick of Toul the following table:

	<i>Livres</i>
Clergy	... 7,628
Nobility	... 396
Officers of the bailiwick	... 238
<i>Tiers</i> (all others)	... 189,615

In this case the *Tiers* furnished 96 per cent. of the direct taxes. Another typical example: in the village Murat-le-Quaire (Puy-de-Dôme), the Countess de Saint-Paulgue, on a land revenue of more than 3,000 *livres*, paid 460 *livres* (or 15 per cent.), while the peasant, Ligier Brugiere, with an income of 179 *livres* paid 157 *livres* (or 88 per cent.)—that is to say, he was assessed six times as high as the Countess.

In 1789 of 475 millions of Budget receipts direct taxation raised 190 millions, or 40 per cent (*taille*: 90 millions, *capitation*: 40 millions, *vingtièmes*: 60 millions).

Let us now examine indirect taxation. On top of the numerous taxes on deeds and conveyances, and those on market transactions (customs and tolls inside the country: there were 1,600 toll-houses in France) were the *aides* and the *gabelle*. The *aides* were taxes on an immense variety of consumers' goods, in particular drinks. This vexatious tax made necessary a most meticulous and incessant control which seriously hampered the development of industry.

But it was especially the *gabelle*—the salt tax—which was the object of the justified hatred of the people. In the regions of the "Great *Gabelle*" every person over seven years of age had to buy from the administration at least

91 pounds of salt: it was "duty" salt reserved "pour le pot et la saliere" (for cookery and cruet); it could not, for example, be used for salting provisions. An army of *gabelle* police saw that the regulations were observed; they could impose the most severe penalties, including the galleys. As this salt-tax varied widely in different parts, salt-smuggling was particularly rife. No fewer than 300 men, one-third of those convicted, went to the galleys each year for smuggling salt or tobacco. To grasp the weight of this tax, it suffices to say that the price of salt was 12 sols a pound in 1789 in the regions of the Great *gabelle*, but fell to one sol in 1790 after indirect taxes were abolished by the Constituent Assembly.

The State did not control these taxes directly. They were "farmed"—that is to say, collected by a concessionnaire who guaranteed the State a given revenue. This concessionnaire was the *Campagnie des Fermiers Généraux* (Company of Farmer-Generals) formed by sixty Farmer-Generals each drawing 300,000 *livres* a year and directing an enormous administration (30,000 employees). To the people, their own poverty appeared a direct consequence of the Farmer-Generals' wealth and the taxes they squeezed from them. They were revolted at the Farmer-Generals profiteering in the taxes which made the tax heavier for them and less productive to the State.

Such were the taxes which weighed on the people in 1789; but let us not forget the tithes and the ever-increasing feudal dues. Only so shall we get a correct idea of the financial state of the country prior to the Revolution. In the opinion of the economist, Dupont de Nemours, the tithe, *cens* (quit-rent), and other feudal dues equalled approximately three-quarters of the King's demands. This shows what a burden was borne by the peasants and artisans, and what an obstacle taxation was to the development of industry. It also shows how, with the most wealthy exempt, the system was incapable of solving the financial problems it created. As M. Marion expressed it, this fiscal system was both "very oppressive and very inefficient."

1 French pounds, 500 grms., compared to the English pound of 450 grms. approximately.

Despite these taxes, the Royal State found itself faced with ever intensifying financial embarrassment. Court expense, waste and fraud on all sides and the cost of the war in America kept the Budget in a state of permanent deficit. Court expenses were 40 millions a year, one-twelfth of the State income; 12,000 noble officers cost as much again. Since the "privileged" in practice paid no taxes, resort was made to borrowing and more borrowing; hence an ever-growing portion of the Budget went to pay interest on debt. The public debt was actually trebled during the fifteen years of the reign of Louis XVI. While debt interest in 1774 cost 93 millions, in 1788 it amounted to 318 millions, or more than half (exactly 50.55 per cent) to total expenditure. To meet current expenses and avoid bankruptcy, money was borrowed from financiers (the farmer-generals for instance) by mortgaging the taxes of future years. In this way taxes were consumed in advance, so that at the opening of the *States-General*, the deficit was only 56 millions, but 90 millions of the revenue due in 1790 and 172 millions of that from the last eight months of 1789 had already been mortgaged. In the eyes of everyone, the situation seemed to be without hope.

The political significance of this enormous army of *rentiers* cannot be ignored. Everybody was fearful of the future. All were sick of Court extravagance, and knew that on the list of subscribers to the public loans were placed, by order of the King, "privileged" persons who, while not subscribing a *livre*, would receive interest on an imaginary sum, fixed at the King's pleasure.

As Jaures notes:¹

"It is easy to understand to what an extent the State creditors were a social force; through them the bourgeoisie were financial masters of the modern State before they gained political power. There was no regime which could have resisted an uprising of the creditors; and the bourgeoisie, creditors of the monarchy of the old regime, no longer felt itself safe with the latter. It always had to fear a complete or partial bankruptcy decreed by the will of one man; and its fear rose with the increase in the debt itself. Rivarol wrote: 'The

¹ Jaures: *Les causes économiques de la Révolution Française*, p. 32.

Revolution was carried out by the rentiers,' and it is quite certain that if many of the bourgeoisie demanded a new order, it was to place the public debt under the guarantee of the nation, more solid than that of the King."

II

Financial and fiscal questions had engrossed attention for a long time. The growing importance of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie prompted the close study of economic phenomena which accompanied the effort of the Encyclopædistes to comprehend critically the whole universe. This was done by the "physiocrats," about whom it is necessary to say a few words.

"It is to the physiocrats," writes Marx, "in bourgeois society that belongs the honour of having analysed capital. And this makes of them the real creators of modern economy."¹

Their system, of which the principal exponents were Dr. Quesnay, Turgot, Le Trosne, Dupont de Nemours, etc., reflects the predominantly agricultural character of French economy at this period. "It corresponds therefore to bourgeois society at the time of its emergence from the feudal system. Its birthplace is theretofore France, above all an agricultural country, and not England, where commerce, industry and mercantile marine dominated." It is, in fact, in agriculture that the origin of surplus value is most easily distinguished: "The total food that the worker consumes, good year, bad year, is less than the total that he produces In agriculture can be seen directly the surplus of use-values produced over the use-values consumed by the worker; there is no need, in order to be able to understand, to analyse value in general and to grasp the nature of value." It is much less evident in industry. Therefore for the physiocrats the only productive labour was agricultural labour, the only one to create surplus value. Industrial labour only modified the form; it did not create surplus value. Thus all wealth came from the working of the land.

¹ Karl Marx: *Histoire des Doctrines Économiques*, published by Costes, Vol. I, p. 40. The following quotations are taken from the same chapter.

The application of this theory of taxation was clear: if all wealth is derived from the working of the land, it was the income from the land which had to be taxed and that alone. Marx ironically drew attention to the fact that "the apparent glorification of landed property finishes with the economic negation of this same property and the confirmation of capitalist production. All taxes are levied on land rents. In other words, landed property is partly confiscated. That is what . . . the legislators of the French Revolution attempted to do."

Naturally, this theory provoked criticism. It seems contrary to common sense to conclude it useless to tax the financier since in the end all taxes fall ultimately on the land. Wide disparities of standpoint produced grave consequences, revealed as the Revolution developed.

For instances, the article on "Taxes" in the *Encyclopædia* (attributed to the Chevalier de Jaucourt) advances boldly the principle of graduated taxation: "Let the State levy most from the people in easy circumstances, and not burden the lowest class at all. While all subjects benefit alike from Government protection and the safety it gives, the disparity in their fortunes and in the advantages they derive calls for assessment in conformity with these inequalities." The article concludes with suggestions of how to render "the nation rich and powerful. . . . (1) Support agriculture and commerce, sources of the wealth of subject and sovereign (3) Restrict the immoderate growth of wealth and useless charges. . . . (4) Abolish monopolies and tolls . . . vexations of the farmers (6) Correct the irritating abuse of the *taille*, the militia, and the salt. . . . (10) Finally, reduce taxes and assess them according to principles of distributive justice. France would be too strong, and the French too happy if these methods were put into practice. But is the dawn of such a beautiful day ready to appear?"

Years had passed since the publication of the *Encyclopædia*, but the *Cahiers de Doleances* of 1789 show how the masses were mobilized by the question of the finances. There is not one *Cahier* which does not devote an essential part of its criticism to public finance. What in general did they demand?

In the first place that an end should be put to arbitrary methods in taxation, that the nation should exercise its control over expenditure as well as over income. For example, here is what is said the *Cahier de Saint-Cyr*:
the excess of bread prices over the wages of necessitous citizens."

"Article 5. That to the Nation, alone, assembled in *States-General* belongs the right to consent to and to remit taxes, to authorize loans and to create offices.

"Article 7. That money standards cannot be altered either by name or otherwise without the assent of the *States-General*."

Certain of the *Cahiers* request the King to reduce his expenditure and that of his Court. But they are unanimous on one essential point: the suppression of indirect taxes and the equal liability of all to taxation. Here is the opinion recorded in the *Cahier* of Chesnay (near Versailles):

2. We request the suppression of the *tailles* and all other accessories, suppression of the *aides, gabelles*, controls, the tobacco farm, and other burdensome, vexatious, and humiliating impositions on the people of the countryside."

And the *Cahier* of Saint-Cyr gives nearly the formulation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man:

"Article 6. That all taxes being a lawful civic charge in common must be equally borne by all without distinction of rank or state, proportionate to their property and ability."

Let us add the moving plea of the *Cahier* of Fosses:

"There is no tax worse, more unjustly, more ridiculously assessed than that of the *gabelle*. It would seem that those who invented it said: a way must be found to make the poor contribute as much or nearly as much as the rich . . . but as we cannot impose on them the *taille*, the accessories on industry, the *corvée*, the *capitation*, the *vingtièmes*, etc . . . because they would not pay them and we would find nothing in their homes corres-

ponding to the assessments, let us invent the heavy taxation of salt: . . . such was the cruel reasoning which the agents of the revenue must have had when they invented this detestable tax."

Some *Cahiers* protest against the taxing of the poorest against the tax "that has been placed on unfortunates for whom the labour of their hands is always insufficient for their subsistence and that of their families. This tax can only owe its invention to souls vile and mercenary, enemies of all justice and without mercy for suffering humanity" (*Cahier of Grauves*) Some *Cahiers* request "that a just proportion of the taxes shall fall on the capitalists and merchants" (*Cahier of Coulmiers*).

In fact the financial demands of the *Cahiers de Doleances* of the *Tiers* can be summarized as follows:

1. The nation alone can agree to taxes;
2. Suppression of indirect taxation;
3. Equal liability of all to taxation; those most rich to pay most, the poorest to be exempt.

Nearly a century later *L'Egalite* published on June 30th, 1880, the programme of the *Parti Ouvrier Francais* (French Workers Party) drawn up by Jules Guesde in collaboration with Marx and Engels, of which one of the clauses was as follows:

"Abolition of all indirect taxes and transforming of all direct taxation into a progressive tax on income over 3,000 francs."

III

We saw earlier what was the financial situation at the time the States-General assembled at Versailles, May 5th, 1789. "The distress of the royal Treasury," stated the Minister Necker, "its general penury, is so visible that it is no longer possible to conceal . . . the extremity of the financial crisis."

The first steps of the National Assembly were the more difficult, because the reforms it was resolved upon only increased the deficit. The suppression of one tax alone

cost 800 millions; tithes were suppressed, but the State had to provide 100 millions a year for the upkeep of the Church. The reorganization of the tax system obviously had to overcome these difficulties, but it necessarily took time, and the need for money was extremely urgent; all the more so because of the famine and the need to purchase wheat from abroad. The National Assembly decided on a supplementary tax which made the privileged pay *taille* and *capitation* for the last six months of the year; at the same time it prescribed the compiling for 1790 of a second book of *vingtième* to include all not in the first list. But once again money was needed at once.

Utilize the classic system of loans? A loan of 30 millions was launched on August 9th, 1789, at 4½ per cent. interest, but on August 27th Necker announced that because the interest was too low it had failed. It had only realized a little more than 2½ millions. A new loan was then launched at 5 per cent., which could be subscribed half in cash and half in deeds for rents. It was more successful, but of the 80 millions that were aimed at not much more than 50 millions was raised. It is clear that the result was quite insufficient.

Meanwhile, as the famine grew, popular agitation extended. On October 5th and 6th the Parisian women marched to Versailles, proclaimed their discontentment and brought the King and the National Assembly to Paris into the midst of the people. It was therefore not by chance that it was precisely on October 6th, 1789, that the National Assembly decided on the "patriotic contribution." The declaration of Mirabeau is famous:

"Here is the list of owners. Frenchmen, choose among the most rich so as to sacrifice the smallest number of citizens. . . *Allons!* these two thousand notables possess enough to pay the deficit. Bring back order into the finances, peace and prosperity."

What did this "patriotic contribution" consist of? In the first place, it will be noted that the word "tax" was replaced by the word "contribution": it was intended to show that this effort was not imposed on the nation, but that it was a sacrifice which it undertook to accomplish.

The contribution was equal to a quarter of the income of everyone. Money and jewels were subject to a tax of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of their value. In conformity with one of the essential demands of the *Cahiers*, incomes of less than 400 *livres* were exempt. The first third was due on April 1st, 1790, the other two-thirds in the two years following. Care was taken to inform the lenders that they would be reimbursed as soon as possible; it was therefore, in fact, a *compulsory* loan.

What was the success of this operation? Here appeared what became more and more evident later, that the rich bourgeoisie did not support the Revolution as did the peasants and the artisans. On March 10th, 1790, it was Dubois de Crance who showed that while the poor, to conform with the intentions of the National Assembly, had exhausted themselves, the rich spared themselves shamelessly. On July 18th, 1790, the Finance Committee of the Assembly avowed that "the class which has most is, in part, the one which has most spared itself, though it only needed, in order to assist the State, to draw upon its surplus or its reserves; while the class in the least easy circumstances, consulting less its strength than its patriotism, has exhausted its income and even deprived itself of necessities."

The Assembly took a series of measures to stimulate the collection of the Contribution (direct levying of those making no returns, or false returns, etc.). In all it produced about 100 millions. But already the members of the Constituent had seen the bad faith of the rich and were speaking of measures to force them to contribute to the common cause.

Concurrently, the Constituent enacted financial reforms. After the famous night of August 4th, on August 27th, 1789, it adopted in its Declaration of the Rights of Man the fundamental principles already several times asserted:

"Article XIII. For the upkeep of public power and to meet the costs of administration, a common contribution is indispensable; it must be equally shared amongst all citizens on the basis of their ability.

"Article XIV. The citizens have the right to verify themselves, or through their representatives, the necessity of the public contribution, to freely consent to it, to its use and determine its *quota*, assessment, collection and duration."

On September 23rd, 1789, a progressive suppression of the *gabelle* was decided; which was completed on March 1st, 1790. Then the Constitution passed to the reorganization of the system of taxation. It replaced the previous taxes by three main taxes: the *contribution fonciere* (law of November 23rd, 1790), the *contribution mobiliere* (January 13th, 1791) and the *impot sur les patentes* (March 2nd, 1791).

The *contribution fonciere* was tax assessed on net income from land and houses. It was not to exceed one-sixth of the budget and was to bring in a total of 300 millions.

The *contribution mobiliere* was also an assessed tax. It included a uniform tax of three days' labour, from which the poorest was exempt, a tax of one-twentieth on industrial incomes, and on personal wealth (fixed in accordance with the rent, and taking into consideration the number of children) a progressive tax on servants, a tax on horses and mules. By these last taxes it was evidently intended particularly to hit in a special way those with large incomes. Sixty millions was expected from it.

Finally, the *impot les patentes* was created by the same law of March 2nd, 1791, which suppressed monopolies. It hit the commercial and industrial professions and was to be fixed according to the rental value of professional premises or offices.

But the institution of this financial reform met with numerous difficulties. The assessment of the "contributions" and the drawing up of the tax lists was placed in the hands of the municipalities, which were ill prepared for the work. In February, 1792, of 40,000 municipalities only 5,448 had discharged the task. The "contributions" were still badly distributed. The proportion of income assessed varied considerably from one locality to another, but the principle of graduation was applied in assessing the contributions in each commune; there were no longer injustices such as were quoted at the beginning of this study. Important progress had been achieved on this point.

IV

The "patriotic contribution" came in slowly. The reorganization of taxes was to bear fruit much later. It was

necessary immediately to find money, to pay Civil Servants, to repay loans, to pay interest on debts, purchase wheat from abroad, and even to deal with social questions. The Constituent had set up a *Comite de Mendicite* presided over by the Duke de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, and this committee explained that assistance to the "unfortunate" class "is a State charge like the payment of Civil Servants, the upkeep of the Church and all other public charges."

Talleyrand and Mirabeau proposed a solution: to place the property of the Church at the disposal of the nation. The latter would continue the charitable services performed by the Church, but it would take over its immense property, valued at 4,000,000,000 *livres*. The Constituent, after a long discussion, decided on October 10th, 1789, by 508 votes to 346, to appropriate the immense domains of the Church to guarantee the State debts.

"What, then, must be done, now that we have no credit, now that we are neither willing nor able to go on mortgaging our revenues, but want on the contrary to free them from encumbrances? We must do what honest owners of property do in similar circumstances: we must sell our patrimony."

The Assembly decided to begin with the sale of lands worth 400 millions. Bonds for that amount were issued to pay the most pressing debt, that contracted with the *Caisse d'Escompte*, a private bank which then dominated commerce and circulated notes. These State bonds, secured upon the sale of Church property, were not a fiduciary issue in the strict sense: they bore 5 per cent. interest and were paid to the *Caisse d'Escompte*, which issued them to the public. The bonds were legal tender in payment for Church property. As the sales proceeded, the bonds would return to the State and be cancelled. Thus the State's debt would be paid. As is seen, it was not a question of money in the strict sense of the term, but bonds bearing interest on *assignats* ("assignments") equivalent to Treasury bills.

But the operation was not successful: people hesitated to involve themselves in the purchase of Church property. They doubted the permanence of the alienation of Church lands. Somethings had to be done. Therefore the Assembly decided

on March 17th, 1790, to make the municipalities the intermediary for all these land sales, and so obviate direct contact between buyers and former owners. Then the first *assignats* were cancelled and on April 17th 1790, replaced with an issue bearing 3 per cent. interest. It was decided to repay all State and Church debts in non-interest bearing "money-*assignats*," and for this purpose to issue, not 400 millions, but 1,200 millions. The decree of April 17th also stipulated that the *assignats* "would have money value between all persons throughout the kingdom and would be accepted as cash in public and private pay-offices." Nevertheless, their official value was not maintained and competition developed between the new paper money and the metal currency, intensified by the fact that the *assignats* were issued at first in multiples of 1,000 *livres*. There was soon an exchange rate of *assignats* in gold.

From the start the *assignats* lost value, as the following figures show. With a gold *louis* of 24 *livres* could be bought in *assignats*:

			<i>livres</i>	<i>sols</i>
January, 1790	.	.	24	17
June, 1790	.	.	26	0
December, 1790	.	.	26	2
March, 1791	.	.	26	15
June, 1791	.	.	28	0
December, 1791	.	.	25	5

Thus the depreciation was considerable. What were the essential reasons? First of all the political uncertainty: people preferred gold or silver to paper money. In consequence, *assignats* were freely offered for sale, while "hard" money was "tight." The emigrants had taken appreciable quantities of bullion abroad, and the State required bullion for its purchases abroad and to repay loans.

However, the sale of Church lands went well; a political result of prime importance, since it proved that the expropriation of Church lands was definitive. It confirmed one of the arguments which had weighed in the creating of the *assignats*: "It is a question," one of the supporters had stated, "of strengthening the Constitution, cutting off hope from its enemies, and binding the people to the new order by their interest." By November, 1791, 1,526 millions of Church lands

had been sold, while only 1,800 millions of *assignats* had been issued (1,200 on September 29th, 1790, and 600 on May 17th, 1791). But the Constituent had authorized the purchase of national property by annual instalments spread over twelve years and the purchasers made wide use of this facility. It followed from this that the *assignats* came in so slowly that nearly all remained in circulation (only 400 millions of the 1,800 millions issued had come in). Moreover, it had been decided to buy out all concessions. They were bought with bonds valid for the purchase of national property, in the same way as *assignats*. The liquidation of these concessions cost 800 millions, from which arose, in consequence of this method of payment, a considerable new inflation.

Another difficulty arose from large denominations in which the *assignats* were issued. As their workers and anti-sans were paid in cash, the employers had to convert *assignats* into cash, and lost on the exchange. The constituent refused for a long time to issue *assignats* of small denominations, which it saw clearly would throw upon the workers and artisans the loss from depreciation, but as gold and silver grew scarcer and were hoarded, banks, municipalities, and private persons made their payments in *Billets de confiance* ("notes of confidence"), virtually "notes of hand." Soon it became clear that the multiplication of these "notes of confidence" was strongly prejudicial to the *assignats*, and the Assembly resigned itself to issuing *assignats* of 50 sous, 25 sous, 15 sous and 10 sous (December 23rd, 1791), and forbade the issuing of new "notes of confidence," which had to be withdrawn from circulation by the end of 1792.

Meanwhile, the sale of national property continued, the State paying off its internal and external debts, assuring its independence and preparing the needed transformation of the fiscal system. Despite the grave depreciation of the *assignats* prices did not show an appreciable increase.

The war and the policy of the Gironde in the Legislative Assembly worsened the financial situation. On this issue, the Girondins, the representatives of the big industrial and commercial bourgeoisie, and the Jacobins, the revolutionary democrats, were to clash.

During the existence of the Legislative no loan was launched: they confined themselves to issuing *assignats*. The emission of *assignats*, which was 980 millions on May 17th, 1791, increased to 1,700 millions on April 30th, 1792, and nearly 2,000 millions in September, 1792. And the expenditure was continually increasing. On November 13th, Cambon, who was the great financier of the following years, declared that for the month of November the estimated receipts were 28 millions and the expenditure 138 millions. In December, 28 millions and the expenditure 138 millions. In December, 1792, the estimated receipts were 39 millions, while the war expenditure alone was 228 millions.

"Had the Gironde not been animated by a class policy, it would have occurred to it to apportion the cost of the war according to accumulated property; it would have proceeded to raise loans and have voted fresh taxation. It would have tried at all costs to check the issue of *assignats*, which had as its consequence a rapid rise in the cost of living. Marat, Saint-Just, Chabot, and Jacob Dupont advised the policy of healthy finance, but they were not listened to.

"The leading financial expert in the Assembly, both then and for a long time after, was the merchant Cambon, who hated the Commune and anarchists, and had recourse to the easiest solution, the printing of *assignats*. On November 13th he proposed, in opposition to Jacob Dupont, to decrease the existing taxes, abolish the *impot mobilier* (tax calculated on rentals) and the *patente* (commercial tax) and reduce the *contribution fonciere* (tax on real property) by 40 millions...!

"Jacob Dupont and the Montagnards were in favour of withdrawing the *assignats* from circulation by shortening the long period allowed to buyers of national property for completing the purchase, of redeeming the debt by means of *quitances de finances*, which were to be used only for the purchase of the property of *emigres*, of raising forced loans, graduated according to the capacity to pay, and of insisting that the *contribution financiere* should be paid in kind. But this policy of deflation was not even seriously considered."*

The struggle was to be continued in the Convention. On the eve of its extinction, the Legislative authorized (on Octo-

1 Albert Mathiez: **French Revolution**, p. 266.

ber 17th, 1792), a new issue of *assignats*, bringing the value of notes in circulation to 2,400,000,000. Such was the policy of the big bourgeoisie.

V

When some attempt to prove that Jacobinism and inflation are synonymous, this is plainly an affront to historical accuracy. This is shown in the speech pronounced by Saint-Just at the Convention on November 29th, 1792:

"We have many tokens and we have very few things. . . . Equal weight must at last be given to the tokens, commodities, and needs: that is the secret of economic administration. . . . I advance the principle that the only way to re-establish confidence and the circulation of commodities is to reduce the quantity of paper now issued and to be parsimonious about creating more."

On the contrary, the Girondins in power accentuated inflation. 3,600,000,000 *assignats* were issued from the time the Convention met up to (June, 1793, or much more than the whole of the notes previously in circulation. Naturally, the *assignats* steadily depreciated.

	<i>Value of gold louis (24 livres) in assignats</i>		
	<i>livres</i>	<i>sols</i>	
November, 1792	34	10
January, 1793	43	0
April, 1793	55	0
June, 1793	72	0

The cost of living rose continually: the popular discontent multiplied. The Girondins were swept from power by a popular uprising and their *laissez-faire* economic policy favouring the rich and the bankers—whom the people justly suspected of collaborating with the emigrants and foreign Powers—was at any rate one of the reasons for their defeat by the Montagnards.

What, then, was the policy of the victors? Voicing the demands of the starving poor, ruined by inflation, it was a policy of stabilizing the currency, summarized in three points:

- to limit the currency in circulation;
- to increase the backing of the *assignats*;
- to control prices.

It was a coherent policy of restoring the finances—purchasing power, as we should say to-day. The following table in *assignats*, the value of 24 livres to a gold *louis*, is significant:

					livres	sols
January, 1793	.	.	.	.	43	15
June, 1793	.	.	.	.	72	0
August, 1793	.	.	.	.	76	0
October, 1793	.	.	.	.	81	0
November, 1793	.	.	.	.	55	0
December, 1793	.	.	.	.	46	10
February, 1794	.	.	.	.	58	0
May, 1794	.	.	.	.	71	0
July (Thermidor)	.	.	.	.	71	0
December, 1794	.	.	.	.	120	0
December, 1795	.	.	.	.	4,385	0
June, 1796	.	.	.	.	12,325	0

This table refutes many calumnies. One sees the serious inflation brought about by the Girondins in the first six months of 1793. Then Robespierre and his friends came to power. During the last six months of 1793 they continued to restore much of its value to the *assignat*: a restoration rarely equalled in financial history. They could not continue, but at Thermidor the *assignat* stood approximately at the same level as when they took power. But from the fall of Robespierre, the *assignat* again fell progressively during 1795 until bankruptcy in 1796.

Robespierre and his friends succeeded in saving France from counter-revolutionary foreign invaders, despite revolts fomented by the agents of the aristocracy and foreign Powers, and made the currency more stable than before. Let us examine the method of this remarkable and rarely-recognized financial success.

Firstly, despite the Girondins, the Jacobins raised a forced loan of 1,000 millions. The law of May 20th, 1793, prescribed: "There shall be a forced levy on all rich citizens of 1,000 millions." It was definitely voted on September 3rd, 1793.

Single persons and widows without children were to benefit by a basic abatement of 1,000 *livres*; married men

and widows with children by 1,500 *livres*; women to benefit by a supplementary 1,000 *livres* for each child or dependent person. The resultant liability was:

<i>Net income</i> <i>livres</i>	<i>Loan</i> <i>livres</i>
1,000	100
1,500	200
2,000	300
3,000	600
4,000	1,000
5,000	1,500
6,000	2,100
7,000	2,700
8,000	3,600
9,000	4,500
10,000	5,500
11,000	6,500

Instalments of one-third collected in loan payments were payable in December, 1793, January, 1794, and February, 1794. *Assignats* were cancelled and burnt, which reduced fiduciary circulation greatly. All who had not paid their share before March 1st, 1794, were, after they had been compelled to pay, deprived of all claim to subsequent repayment.

It is interesting to recall in relation to this loan that the deputy Joseph Delaunay of Angers had proposed to tax the capital of financial companies: "Let the financial companies," he proposed, "be obliged to turn over to the National Treasury, within a fortnight, a sum proportionate to their wealth. Force them to loan 20 per cent. of their capital to the Republic calculated on the current price of their shares or the rate of interest."

Revolutionary France was definitely very conscious that the counter-revolution was speculating on the financial difficulties, and aggravating them, seeking to strangle the nation. One of the reasons urged in favour of the forced loan was that it would prevent the rich from financing the counter-revolution. Thuriot, member of the Convention, declared on May 20th, 1793:

"To establish a forced loan on the rich is to obtain a great victory. These men are bound to the counter-revolution. They supply money to those in revolt in Vendee; they supply it to the emigrants; let us compel them to devote their treasures to the defence of the Republic and so make them wish for our success."

On August 24th, 1793, the Convention decreed the compilation of the Great Book of the Public Debt. It was designed to include all State creditors without distinction; the debts of the old regime, along with new debts, were all "republicanized." Holders of pre-Revolution bonds were thus given interest in the success of the Revolution. One clause permitted the conversion of 1,000 *livres* or more in *assignats* into a debt in the Great Book bearing 5 per cent. interest. Sums paid in this way were deducted from instalments due on the forced loan. In this way also the Convention sought to reduce the volume of *assignats* in circulation. On June 7th, 1793, a decree allowed a premium to purchasers of national property who fulfilled their payments in advance of the date of expiry.

At the same time as it attempted to reduce the circulation of *assignats*, the Convention sought to increase their backing. To Church estates valued at 2,500,000,000 *livres* had been added the property of the emigrants (nearly 2,000,000,000), the Royal forest domains (1,200,000,000) and the estates of the Order of Malta (400,000,000). In this way, a more secure backing was given to the increased currency.

But it was necessary to fight against speculation and against the manœuvres of the foreign agents. A printing press of forged *assignats*, directed by Calonne, ex-Minister of Finance of Louis XVI, operated at the headquarters of Coblenz. These forged *assignats* were smuggled in to bribe collaborators and to upset the currency. The instructions given to an English spy were found:

"Cause the exchange to rise to 200 *livres* to the pound sterling. . . . The *assignats* must be discredited as much as possible, such as do not bear the King's effigy refused. Force up the price of all commodities. If you can persuade Cott . . . to buy up tallow and candles at any price, make the public pay up to 5 *livres* per pound."

The Convention replied by severe measures against all who attempted to discredit the Republican currency. An official exchange rate of the *assigniat* was finally fixed at the demand of the Commune. Pitt extended special credits to enable Paris bankers to sell London stocks in Paris and so depreciate the currency and secure the transfer of capital. On July 17th, 1793, the Committee of Public Safety closed the Stock Exchange (*Bourse*); on August 1st it banned the export of capital; on August 8th it sequestrated all foreign banks.

We have just spoken of the forced loan. The great idea of Robespierre and his friends was to force the rich, whose republican integrity was suspect, to contribute to the defence of the Revolution. "When will their interest (that of the rich) blend with that of the people? Never!" wrote Robespierre in his private notebook. Moreover, in his diary he wrote: "tax the big wholesalers heavily so that the retailers can sell." The friends of Robespierre therefore carried out everywhere a policy already popular at this period which *made the rich pay*.

Robespierre condensed this policy into Article 12 of his proposed Declaration of Rights adopted on April 21st, 1793, by the Jacobins:

"Article 12. Citizens whose income does not exceed what is necessary for their subsistence are exempted from contributing to public expenditure; others must bear it progressively to the extent of their fortune."

A few examples:

Saint-Just and Lebas, representatives on mission to Strasbourg (November, 1793) had their famous proclamation posted:

"10,000 men are bare-footed in the Army; you must unshoe all the aristocrats of Strasbourg and to-morrow, at 10 o'clock in the morning, the 10,000 pairs of boots must be on the march to Army headquarters."

At Lyons Fouche and Collot d'Herbois decided that "all elderly and invalid citizens must be housed, fed, and clothed at the expense of the rich."

The representatives Couthon and Maignet raised a contribution of 18,000 *livres* payable within twenty-four hours from the "egotistical rich" of Clermont: 8,000 as a dowry for four poor young girls, picked from among the families of the defenders of the nation, 7,000 in aid of the necessitous, and 3,000 to cover the expenses of a popular celebration. After Thermidor, the municipality wrote that "never had payment been made so exactly and promptly or so unjustly claimed."

Representative Laplanche wrote from Bourges to the Committee of Public Safety on September 29th, 1793: "My revolutionary taxes work wonders. . . . The tax that I ordered yesterday to buy means of subsistence and in part to relieve necessitous families amounted to 800,000 *livres*. You can judge as to whether I have supporters among the the people and whether these revolutionary methods are of a kind to conquer all hearts for the Revolution."

VI

Finally, the last weapon of the Committee of Public Safety was that of the maximum price of commodities fixed by the central power. This was imposed as a result of popular protests against the increasing prices of articles of prime necessity in consequence of speculation and monopoly.

On February 4th, 1793, the General Council of the Commune decided to prevent any increase in the price of bread by imposing a special tax of 4 millions on the rich. Two months later Danton affirmed likewise that "it is necessary, over the whole of France, to fix the price of bread in fair proportion to the wages of the poor, any in excess will be paid by the rich." And the Convention decided: "In every Section in the Republic where the price of grain is out of fair proportion to the wages of the workers, the necessary funds raised by a levy on big fortunes will be paid by the Public Treasury to cover the excess of bread prices over the wages of necessitous citizens."

After long discussions, the the principle of the maximum was established on September 29th, 1793. The Committees were charged with preparing lists of maximum prices of commodities: for produce and merchandise, they were to be

based on real prices in 1790, plus one-third. A little later (October 22nd, 1793) the Convention decided to set up a Committee of Subsistence, which was to take in hand the economic government of the country. It was successively given the monopoly of imports and the right to authorize exports.

A general verdict on the effects of the maximum is difficult to give. Some seek to prove that it caused disorganization and the disappearance of all commodities. Without denying of all the difficulties encountered in its application, let us quote the opinion of a hostile observer, Mallet du Pan, who pointed out to the foreign Powers that with the maximum "the Convention has carried out an operation which was very economic and very popular." M. G. Lefebvre writes: "The labour of men and the value of things are subject to the fixing of prices. The maximum reduced commercial profits but left an incentive to production. Contrary to current assertions, all enterprises did not work at a loss during the Year II, but they did not realize as great profits as they might have done at the public expense of the nation. The principle was that no one had the right to gamble on the nation's peril."

Wages were fixed at the level of 1790, plus a half (instead of one-third, as for commodities); that is to say that real wages were increased nominally by one-sixth. Actually, as the workers had obtained wage increases since 1790, the maximum brought about reductions. The discontent which resulted facilitated the attack of the "corrupt" against the "Incorruptible" on Thermidor 9th, and facilitated his fall without great popular reaction.

Let us not forget that Robespierre, though in power, was never able to carry out his financial programme completely. In his speech of 8th Thermidor, he violently attacked Cambon: "The counter-revolution has control of our finances." He accused him of "favouring rich creditors, of ruining poor men, and of bringing them to despair, thus increasing discontent." Cambon, always an adversary of Robespierre, was after Thermidor considered too revolutionary. He was to know both prison and exile.¹

1 Cambon died in Belgium in 1820, having been exiled as a regicide.

VII

Robespierre and his friends, after fighting courageously, ended by failing. Let us now consider what they would have had to do to retain power. Their dream of an equalitarian republic, without rich or poor, was pure Utopia. "The Jacobins were not destined to win a complete victory, chiefly because eighteenth-century France was surrounded on the Continent by countries that were too backward, and also because France itself was not possessed of the material requisite for Socialism, since there were no banks, no capitalist syndicates, no machine industry, no railroads."¹

After Thermidor, economic legislation was inspired by a consultative bureau, on which, with other business-men members, was the banker Perregaux, who was in touch with Pitt. It prepared the abolition of maximum, the re-establishment of the free export of capital, the lifting of the embargo on English stocks, etc. More and more inflation developed: the catastrophic fall of the *assignat* after Thermidor has been noted above. In the Year III, nearly 15,000,000,000 of notes were printed—as many as in all the four preceding years. As a result of this inflation, and the increase in prices, the Treasury fell into ever-increasing difficulties. The Directory turned towards the powerful companies of contractors and bankers, who alone could advance the necessary money. They in return imposed their conditions.

When at the final sitting of the Convention, the democrats proposed a cumulative tax, a deputy declared: "It is in such circumstances as now exist that we must see how especially useful the big capitalists can be to the Republic." The democrats fought against the first attempts to establish a bank (which later became the *Banque de France*). Robert Lindet exclaimed: "I do not doubt that its establishment will be an advantage to the shareholders. But it will be fatal for France. Will the Republic witness for long its contractors accumulating millions and depreciating the *assignats*." Another deputy added: "This idea of a bank makes me shudder: it locks up the Constitution of 1795 in the

¹ Lenin: **Collected Works**, Vol. xx, Part 2, p. 278. "Can Jacobinism frighten the Working Class?"

bankers' safe." 'But it was too late. With Robespierre, Saint-Just, and Couthon had disappeared the flame of the Revolution. Soon the bankers, Perregaux, Mallet and a few others were able to help General Bonaparte to carry out his *coup d'état* and set up "a bourgeois government which strangled the French Revolution and only maintained such results of the Revolution as were of advantage to the big bourgeoisie" (Stalin).

VIII

In conclusion. We have attempted to bring out the fundamental tendencies of the Revolution in the realm of finance. But how many comparisons force themselves, even when care is taken not to envisage the past in terms of present day circumstances, but to see the facts in relation to the historic events which accompanied and determined them!

If, in Jaures' formula, we seek in the French Revolution the solution of all our present political problems, we see that in finance, at any rate, the Revolution—the Jacobins—proved that democracy restores finances, while the big bourgeoisie throws them into disorder and leads the way to bankruptcy. This study has shown that methods adopted by the Jacobins—making the rich pay, banning the export of capital, controlling the banks—enable them to secure the independence of the French Republic against the men of Coblenz and their foreign allies. When our Communist Party repeats after Robespierre, after Jules Guesde, "Suppression of indirect taxation. Progressive tax on incomes," when it demands a levy on big fortunes, the nationalization of monopolies, and the control of banks, it preserves the true tradition of the French revolutionaries. In Lenin's words, "it aims at all that the eighteenth century Jacobins achieved that was great, indestructible, and unforgettable."

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE POPULAR MASSES

Notes On The Parisian Sections And The
Popular Societies

By Jean Bruhat

Fellow Of The University

THE destruction of feudalism by the French Revolution and the advent of the bourgeois regime was made possible only by the co-operation of the popular masses. The French Revolution was "a popular revolution which was victorious because it brought into action against feudalism enormous popular masses and defended the interests of the Third Estate" (Stalin).

A study of the Parisian sections and of the popular societies under the Revolution shows concretely how the masses took a decisive part in the struggle and how the most progressive, the most consistent men of the Revolution found their support among the masses.

I

The Sections of Paris

The Parisian Sections played a role of first-rate importance in the Revolution. They were at first only administrative organs, but their character soon changed. The people found in them a means of defence and of coercing hesitant governments. Their evolution has been exactly defined by Ernest Mellee, their best historian:

"At first only electoral assemblies," he writes, "they transformed themselves under stress of circumstances into genuine municipalities enjoying practically complete autonomy, and capable, by co-ordinated action, of imposing their will on the legislative power."

The origin of the Sections is plain, as was also their utilization by the people of the capital. A comparison will make them easily intelligible. Under our Constitution, voters of Paris and all other French citizens go to the polls to elect a deputy. Having made this gesture, they return to their normal occupations. Imagine for a moment that all the electors on the register at each polling station gathered together after the poll has closed. Imagine them constituting among themselves an Electors' Association and appointing a committee to make contact with other Electors' Associations in the constituency (or Section). It was in this way that the Sections of Paris came into being during the Revolution.

The royal regulation of April 13th, 1789, divided Paris into sixty districts. After the elections the voters continued to meet and deliberate in permanent assemblies. They intervened in public affairs. Thus in January, 1790, the Cordeliers district opposed the arrest of Marat, who was being prosecuted. The Constituent Assembly, which disapproved of such manifestations, suppressed the districts and replaced them by forty-eight Sections. This measure, in the intention of the authors, was reactionary. The district had adopted the habit of being in permanent session; this was prohibited by the Constituent; despite the opposition of Robespierre. In the intention of the Constituent, the Sections were nothing but electoral areas; their inhabitants were to assemble only to vote and then disperse.

The citizens of Paris soon made a mockery of these precautions. The Sections protested against the distinction between active citizens (the rich) and passive citizens (the poor). On June 8th, 1791, the Section of Sainte-Genevieve (Pantheon district) decided to appoint two delegates mandated to meet those of other Sections and, adopting a suggestion by Robespierre, to draft a petition to the National Assembly with a view to obtaining the abrogation of the decrees establishing differences between citizens. A year later, on July 25th, 1792, the Section of the Louvre drew up an address along the same lines:

"On the necessity of giving the right of active citizenship to all citizens who pay the slightest contribution,

considering their justified murmurs at being counted as nothing in the State, while they serve the nation with their arms, with their wives and children; but to deprive of this advantage all citizens known by their fellows to be of bad conduct, monopolists, stockjobbers. . . .”

As for the Section of the Theatre Francais (Odeon district), it went further and itself abolished the distinction between active and passive citizens.

On August 10th, 1792, the Sections of Paris obtained satisfaction. After the overthrow of the monarchy, the Legislative decided that the new Assembly, the Convention, would be elected by universal suffrage. To this victory the campaign of the Paris Sections largely contributed. They, however, continued to struggle. The Legislative had maintained the two-stage system of election: citizens of each Section named electors who, assembled at the *Hotel de Ville*, chose the deputies. The Section of the place Vendome (that of Robespierre) declared that “all those mandated by the people must be nominated directly by the people.” It requested that at least the choice made by the “electors” should not be considered as final; “that the deputies nominated by the electors be submitted to the Sections in primary assemblies for their examination and ratification, so that the majority can reject those who might be unworthy of the confidence of the people.”

Universal suffrage is an essential democratic liberty. It was largely because of the pressure of the Sections of Paris that it was proclaimed.

What was the life of the Sections of Paris? They were in permanent session, but let us understand this expression. The Sections were not in session day and night. The Section Assemblies opened at five or six o'clock in the evening. In July, 1792, the Sessions of the Sections became public, with women and young people not eligible to vote in the galleries. A bureau of correspondence ensured contact between the various Sections of the capital.

“Communications will in this way be promptly assured; malevolence, lack of patriotism, negligence in this way will not be hidden from the knowledge of the citizens.”

The bureau was a sort of Central Committee for the Paris Sections. Furthermore, the Sections were authorized to hold meetings of their representatives in the *Hotel de Ville* (Town Hall).

It was the Sections of Paris which prepared the insurrection of August 10th, 1792. The situation will be remembered. The treachery of the King had become evident. He was negotiating with the enemy; he sabotaged the application of the decrees decided by the Legislative. Discontent and anger were rising throughout the country. A first demonstration of hostility to the King took place on June 20th. No results came of it. The agitation developed in the Sections. They prepared the insurrection and "August 10th was a well-made insurrection." In Paris there were volunteers from the departments. They were called *Federes* (Federals) because they had been delegated to the celebrations of July 14th, 1792. They were incorporated in the various Sections; those from Marseilles in the Section of the *Theatre Francais*, those from Brest in the Section of the *Faubourg Saint-Marceau* (Section of *Gobelins*). On July 31st the Section *Mauconseil* declared the King deposed. It made it the Section *Mauconseil* declared the King deposed. It made plain that it no longer recognized Louis XVI as King of the French. A delegation of the Section of *Gravilliers* went to the Legislative Assembly and declared:

"Legislators, we leave to you the honour of serving the Nation; but if you refuse, we will be forced to take a hand. It was in vain that the Assembly declared the decision and save ourselves."

It was in vain that the Assembly declared the decision of the Section of *Mauconseil* null and void: forty-seven Sections of the forty-eight voted the deposition of Louis XVI. Meantime, the Brunswick manifesto became known.

The Duke of Brunswick was the commander-in-chief of the Prussian Army. He issued a manifesto which had in fact been suggested by the Queen, *Marie-Antoinette*, and drafted by an emigrant, *M. de Limon*; this manifesto threatened Paris with total destruction. The *sectionaries* preferred the risks of struggle to servitude. On August 4th the Section of *Quinze-Vingts* launched an ultimatum: if on August 9th, at eleven o'clock in the evening, the people had not

obtained the deposition of the King, then "at midnight the tocsin will ring and the alarm will be sounded and all will rise at the same time."

The date of August 9th approached and the Legislative Assembly had come to no decision. On August 7th the Section Mauconseil proposed that each Section elect six delegates to meet at the *Hotel de Ville*, but their duties were still restricted. On August 9th, at eleven o'clock in the evening, the Section of Quinze-Vingts went further. It decided:

"That three commissars be appointed by each Section to meet at the Commune and determine prompt methods to save the common cause¹ and, with this in view, have decided only to accept orders from the Commissars of the majority of all the Sections assembled."

This proposal was communicated to all the Sections. They immediately nominated their representatives, who assembled at the *Hotel de Ville*. The eighty-two delegates, elected by the Sections formed an "insurrectional Commune." It was the opening of the insurrection. At the call of the Sections of Paris, the people of the capital, supported by the *Federes* of the *Departements*, stormed the Tuileries: the monarchy was overthrown.

To grasp the importance of these events, nothing can be more telling than a few details.

As an example, this is what took place in a typical Section, that of the Poissonniere (Rue Saint-Denis districts), during the night of August 9th—10th: Members of the Section gathered in General Assembly in the Church of Saint-Lazare, their usual meeting place, on the evening of August 9th at eight o'clock. The Section decided to send delegates to meet those of the other Sections at the *Hotel de Ville*. They cashiered all officers of the battalion of the National Guard of Saint-Lazare "not prepared to accept orders from chiefs that they had not appointed." Other officers were immediately elected. This was already the republican spirit before the Republic had been proclaimed. A delegation of the *Federes* of the Basses-Alpes (Lower Alps) from the barracks of the Rue Poissonniere came and placed themselves

¹ Term actually used: *Chose publique*—literally, "public thing."

under the orders of the Section in this way recognizing their leadership. Their spokesman declared:

"The *Federes* . . . have come to present themselves to the Assembly and offer to it their bodies and their patriotism, pointing out that they are in despair since they have no arms to second and defend their brothers, the Parisians; on the contrary, they are exposed in the barracks, where they are billeted to all the hostile manœuvres of the malevolent; consequently, they plead with the Assembly to take a determined decision regarding them."

The Assembly decided on the spot that the *Federes* should be billeted at the Barracks of Saint-Lazare, and that arms should be distributed to them so that they might "contribute in the common defence."

At three o'clock in the morning, the Section sounded the call to arms and at four o'clock the insurrection began.

The following are the last lines of the Minutes of the Section Poissoniere:

"At four o'clock in the morning, the Assembly having learnt that the different Sections of Paris were already under arms and were about to march to combat the supporters of despotism, decreed on the spot that they would adjourn to the Place Saint-Lazare to form into battle order and go to unite with their brothers of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine."

Events developed in this way in all the Paris Sections. Thanks to their political understanding, to their initiative, to their heroism, the monarchy was about to be overthrown. It was also the Sections which on May 31st and June 2nd, 1793, ensured the victory of the Montagnards over the Girondins and checkmated the intrigues of the reactionary big bourgeoisie.

But the Sections of Paris not only participated in great popular movements; by patient daily work they consolidated the power of the Revolution. They were the best collaborators of the revolutionary government.

They furnished volunteers for the wars of Vendee, and often ensured their upkeep and equipment—at the expense of the rich. On March 9th, 1793, the Section of Gravilliers addressed the following petition of the Conven.

"Mandatories of the people, it is time to save the Republic. The most rabid enemies, intent on its destruction, are those who ruin, starve and drive the people to desperation; those who tolerate crime share its blame. . . . There is no liberty without good laws; there is no equality when one class of men starve and betray the others with impunity.

"Mandatories of the people, do you want the whole of France to rise? Strike to death the egotists who, by monopoly, kill the citizens whom old age and infirmity confine to their homes; at last make the thunder of the power which is delegated to you fall on the tigers who carry on a commerce detrimental to three-quarters of the population, who hoard in the granaries of avariciousness the commodities of prime necessity to which men have a legal right from the moment they see the light of day.

"The nation has the right to dispose of our strength. But the mandatories of the people must open up the treasures of the nation to those who are in want, to those who suffer from the absence of their husbands. They must purge the Republic of traitors who, by their usurious calculations ceaselessly strike death-blows against it; they must at last consult the wishes of the people, remedy their wrongs, prevent need, and do everything possible for their welfare, if they do not want to live dishonoured and, like that last king of the French, die the death of traitors."

The revolutionary committees of the Sections watched, tracked down, and arrested suspects, but they had been slandered. Actually, in most cases, they acted with great political understanding. In its work, the Committee of Section Reunion took for its motto: "Never denounce from personal malice, but only in the public interest." The Assistance Committees of each Section ensured the distribution of aid to the needy in its area. Their Military Committees, their Salpêtre Committees, were active in all questions of national defence. The Sections even constituted Agricultural Committees to make use of all waste ground in Paris. From July, 1793, each Section had its Commissioner of Requisitions, who received and verified all declarations of edible commodities made by the shopkeepers. It was he who

saw to the application of the laws on the maximum.

The destiny of the Parisian Sections was tied to that of the progressive Revolution. They were stifled after the fall of Robespierre. The Theormidorians suppressed the fee of 40 *sous* per session, which had been accorded on September 9th, 1793, to those members of the Sections who "had no other resources with which to live but the labour of their hands." The General Assembly of the Sections was only to be held once every ten days (previously they had taken place twice a week, Thursdays and Sundays). But the Sections of Paris did not admit defeat. They participated in the past popular uprising in *Germinal* and *Prairial* of the Year III (April-May, 1795). The outcome was defeat. It was the beginning of the White Terror; and on October 9th, 1795, the Assemblies of the Sections were prohibited.

II

The Popular Societies and Clubs

Side by side with the Parisian Sections, merging with them and extending to the provinces, were the popular societies and clubs—the most effective militant groups of the French people during the Revolution. The best-known in the clubs is undoubtedly the Jacobin Club.

Originally this was only a parliamentary club. The Breton deputies of the *Tiers Etat* and the lower clergy formed a club in Versailles known as the "Breton Club." Its members continued to meet after the transfer of the Constituent Assembly to Paris. But they admitted to their Club deputies who did not come from Brittany, such as Robespierre, and also citizens who were not deputies, such as the painter David, the journalist Fabre d'Eglantine and the carpenter Duplay (with whom Robespierre afterwards lodged). As the Club met in the Convent of the Jacobins, Rue Saint-Honore, it took the name of the Club of the Jacobins. It was imitated in the Departments. By August, 1790, there were 152 clubs affiliated to the Jacobins of Paris. They were set up in Lille, Strasbourg, Metz, Lyon, Marseilles, Toulouse, Bordeaux, etc. Originally the annual subscription

was rather high: 25 *livres* in Paris, 24 at Nîmes, 28 *livres 8 sous* in Toulouse, 14 *livres 8 sous* and an entrance fee of 6 *livres* in Metz. At an early stage, however, measures were taken to open the clubs to less-well-off people. At Montauban, the subscription varied according to the means (24, 18, 12 or 6 *livres* per year), while passive citizens were admitted free of charge. The Club at Metz took similar action. But on the whole, members of the Jacobin Clubs were at first predominantly bourgeois. In this lies the explanation of their programme. They were devoted to the Revolution, but feared the popular masses. Many of the members of the Jacobin Clubs did, at the beginning, despite Robespierre, approve the property-based suffrage established by the Assembly.

At this time the opinion of the poorer strata found expression in the popular societies. There were in Paris one or more of these in each Section. Marat, with his keen understanding of the masses, greeted the birth of these popular societies. He well deserved to be called "the father of the fraternal societies". As early as 1791 he wrote of them:

"Formed by good patriots who will know one another, who will love one another and who will all have at heart the public welfare, they will not be divided by factions, led astray by cabals, or corrupted by the enemies of the nation. The general interest will be the object of all wills; it will be for them therefore only a question of determining the most just and most effective means of arriving at it. . . .

"It follows from this that the societies will not waste time in scandalizing quarrels, in vain disputes, in manœuvres or intrigues, and that they will perform great deeds: a very precious advantage on all occasions when the common weal is in danger. It follows from this again that they will be a school of continuous education for all citizens. Thus, these citizens, passing to the Assemblies of the Sections, will not be duped by knaves who always start by deceiving them so as to sacrifice them. They will take with them views and opinions already formed on the question discussed and will necessarily throw themselves into the balance on the side of the general good."

In the popular societies no distinction was drawn between active and passive citizens. Membership was made

easy even to women and young people. The first popular society was, it would appear, the *Societe Fraternelle de l'un et l'autre sexe* (Fraternal Society of Both Sexes), set up alongside the Club of the Jacobins by Claude Dansart, boarding-house keeper. It opened in February, 1790, and in November, the *Chronique de Paris* published the following item in connection with it:

"A boarding-house keeper, activated by a sentiment of patriotism, gathers together each evening in the hall of the Jacobins, Rue Saint Honore, several artisans and greengrocers of the district with their wives and children to read and explain to them the decrees of the National Assembly. With this in view, he brings a piece of candle in his pocket with a lighter and some tinder. When the candle is on the point of expiring, some of those present subscribe to buy another candle, which enables the session to continue until ten o'clock in the evening, to the great satisfaction of all assembled."

Such societies multiplied. One of the most active of these was the *Amis des droits de l'homme et du citoyens* (Friends of the Rights of Man and the Citizen) on the right bank of the Seine. It admitted passive citizens. It allowed women to attend its meetings and only asked of its members a small subscription of 2 sols per month. As it held its meeting in the Church of the Cordeliers, it is better known as the Club of the Cordeliers. Among its members were Camille Desmoulins, Fabre d'Eglantine, who became a deputy to the Convention, Marat, Danton, the butcher Legendre, and Hebert, who launched the *Pere Duchene*. The Cordeliers demanded equality of rights as had been inscribed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. They demanded universal suffrage.

Other popular societies were set up. Following are the names of a few formed in Paris: The Faubourg Saint-Antoine gave birth to two, the *Societe Fraternelle des Amis des Droits de l'Homme, Enemies du Despotisme* (Fraternal Society of the Friends of the Rights of Man, Enemies of Despotism) and the *Club des Amis des Droits de l'Homme*. There was the *Amis de la Loi* (Friends of the Law) in the Section Palais Royal, the *Societe Patriotique de la Section de la Bibliotheque* (Patriotic Society of the Section of the Bibliotheque), the *Societe des Indigents* (Society of the

Indigents) in the Section of the Quatre-Nations, the *Societe Patriotique de la Section Saint-Geneviere*, etc.

The activity of these societies was decisive. It was they who organized the campaign against the restricted franchise. In Paris, as also in Lyons, they decided to federate, and formed a Central Committee of Patriotic Societies. The distinction between passive and active citizens had roused the indignation of the people. The *Societe des Indigents* sent an address of congratulations to Robespierre, who in the Constituent Assembly had fought for universal suffrage. The Club of the Cordeliers published Robespierre's speech. The Club of the Friends of Liberty in the Rue de Bac expressed itself plainly:

"A law which says that to be eligible to such or such a post it is necessary to pay a certain sum of money, cannot be a law because Article 6 of the Rights of Man forbids you the right to say so and still less to proclaim it."

The Central Committee of the Patriotic Societies posted on all the walls of Paris on June 15th, 1791, a petition signed by the representatives of thirteen popular societies. The following is an extract:

"Fathers of the nation, those who obey laws that they have not made or sanctioned are slaves. You have declared that laws could only be the expression of the general will and the majority is composed of citizens strangely called 'passive'. . . . If you do not take steps to efface for ever these different degrees of eligibility which manifestly violate your Declaration of the Rights of Man, the nation is in danger. On July 14th, 1789, the town of Paris continued 300,000 armed men; the active list published by the municipality shows hardly 80,000 citizens. Compare and judge!"

The demonstration was clear. Great feeling existed in moderate bourgeois circles against the participation of the popular masses in public affairs. One of their papers, *L'Ami des Patriotes*, expressed its discontent as follows:

"There has just been posted at all street corners a petition which threatens openly serious trouble if the Assembly does not revoke its decree. . . . 300,000 men in arms are spoken of. The petition is signed by the

presidents of thirteen clubs which exist in Paris. . . It is time for men of goodwill of all parties to unite against the common enemy; it is not liberty which is in question, but property, existence itself."

The popular societies formed the vanguard of the struggle for universal suffrage. Some popular societies went further. They expressed "equalitarian" demands, as did the *Cercle Social*, to which Karl Marx paid homage. The Social Circle had been created by the Abbe Fauchet and gathered audiences of more than 4,000. The Constituent Assembly attempted in every way to raise obstacles to the development of the popular societies. Despite Robespierre's protests, they cancelled their right to petition and to placard their manifestoes. Petty behaviour: the popular societies maintained their place at the head of the struggle, as was clearly shown on their flight of the King to Varennes.

In June, 1791, King Louis XVI attempted to fly from Paris and join the mutinous General de Bouille, commanding at Metz. Before his departure, Louis XVI drew up a manifesto to the country in which he denounced the Societies of Friends of the Constitution which formed "an immense corporation more dangerous than any that existed previously."

Indirect homage to the action of the popular societies! As is known, the King was arrested at Varennes; but this flight, a new proof of royal treason, provoked the birth of a republican movement at the head of which stood the popular societies. The Club of the Cordeliers amended its civic oath by omitting the promise of fidelity to the King. It decided to have posted a clearly republican petition:

"Legislators," it declared, "you had dissipated the powers of the nation which you represent; you had invested Louis XVI with excessive authority; you had sanctioned tyranny by instituting the King as irremovable, inviolable and hereditary; you had sanctioned the enslavement of the French by declaring that France was a monarchy."

"Good citizens lamented. Opinion was vehemently shocked. But the law existed, and we have obeyed it. We awaited our salvation through the progress of enlightenment and philosophy."

" . . . But times have changed. The so-called contract of a people with its king no longer exists. Louis has abdicated royalty; henceforth Louis means nothing to us unless he becomes our enemy."

The Jacobins still hesitated. They demanded that the King should be publicly interrogated—to give "the world a great example of the sacred right possessed by the people to judge their tyrants." But passion was rising. While the moderates wanted to exonerate the King, the people demanded that he should be tried and sentenced. On July 12th, the Cordeliers launched a new "Appeal to the Nation." A petition was placed on the Altar of the Nation in the Champ de Mars and the citizens were invited to come and sign it. Incidents occurred, and on July 17th 1791, the first republicans were shot. There was a period of repression; but, after a setback, the popular societies became even more numerous.

The character of the Jacobin Club itself became transformed.

To the degree that advances were made, the Club of the Jacobins was opened more and more to popular elements. The Legislative met. The position grew worse. Since war had been declared (April 20th, 1792) the activity of the counter-revolutionaries had been reinforced. The King proved a traitor. The popular societies, the Jacobins, in which Robespierre played a very active role, participated in the struggle against the monarchy.

A new period in the history of the popular societies opened after August 10th, 1792. They became the support of the revolutionary Government. Through them the necessary contact was established between the Government and the people. The Jacobin Club became thenceforward the centre of the "Mountain" Party. The societies of the provinces kept in contact with it, whether they were directly affiliated or only corresponded with it. The names varied greatly. They changed, moreover, at each new stage of the Revolution. But whatever their title, the popular societies had everywhere more or less the same role. They watched the administration of measures decided by the Convention. They sought out suspects and brought them to the notice of the representatives in the Convention. The popular societies organized the search for saltpetre required for the manufacture of gunpowder. They made collections to provide

for the upkeep of the families of the volunteers, whom "these defenders of Liberty" had had to abandon. They created in their midst Subsistence Committees and also Assistance Committee Subsistence Committees and also Assistance Committees. They pressed for the application of the law of the maximum and the imposition of forced loans on the rich; they combated the sabotage of production by counter-revolutionary elements. It was in this way that the Jacobins of Grenoble requested of the Convention that the owners of the factories or workshops who suspended production should be deprived of the enterprises, that the enterprises be nationalized and that the former employers should be obliged to work therein for the benefit of the nation. And especially, the popular societies constituted reserves of patriots, disinterested, devoted, courageous, in whom the representatives on missions found indispensable collaborators in the work of national and popular redress.

It is rather difficult to indicate the composition of the popular societies. Nevertheless, a few details are available. For example, it is known that the popular societies of Cugnaux (Haute-Garonne) included the following:

32	agricultural workers
2	blacksmiths
2	brokers
1	wheelwright
3	masons
1	merchant
2	tailors
2	bootmakers
1	cook
1	carter

Here is a table indicating the social composition of ten clubs:

Occupation	Colmar	Grenoble	Lille	Limoges	Moulins	Georges Nuit St.
Clergy	. .	37	13	30	9	36 2
Officers	. .	25	15	179	3	5 11
Legal profession	24	18	36	21	44	11
Other liberal professions	. 50	29	80	17	33	8
Merchants	. 48	52	102	24	30	11

Shopkeepers	96	65	145	11	27	42
Artisans	113	66	139	13	35	69
Peasants	34	5	4	3	5	46
Soldiers	110	2	77	—	5	3
Civil Servants	95	22	90	36	111	—
Occupation unknown	405	145	210	15	53	13
<i>Occupation</i>		<i>Rosez</i>	<i>Thann</i>	<i>Toulouse</i>	<i>Tulle</i>	
Clergy	—	26	6	17	4	
Officers	—	4	5	8	2	
Legal profession	—	3	5	10	28	
Other liberal professions	—	33	16	15	27	
Merchants	—	27	14	14	26	
Shopkeepers	—	51	40	12	64	
Artisans	—	55	55	7	102	
Peasants	—	4	20	2	26	
Soldiers	—	10	2	2	11	
Civil Servants	—	78	12	18	11	
Occupation unknown	—	349	65	37	63	

It should be added that most clubs admitted women; while in Paris, as in the provinces, societies were created composed solely of women.

On the whole, it can be said that the clubs well represented the popular masses of the time and that the petty-bourgeoisie and artisans constituted the majority.

How did the popular societies function? The following details are taken from the work of L. de Cardenal, *La Province pendant la Revolution*.

Generally, in the meeting rooms, a barrier divided the deliberative members from the public; benches against the wall were occupied by those who could not find seats on the floor. In most cases women citizens occupied reserved seats. Some societies took the precaution of barring admission by standing orders to young children and inebriated persons.

At one end, in the centre, was the bureau—that is to say, the president's chair and his bell, a table for the secretaries, and an ink-stand and, to dry the ink, a box of sand, which later was coloured red.

Hanging on the walls, in frames more or less luxurious, were patriotic pictures, the Declaration of the Rights of Man, "The Tennis Court Oath," by David, sometimes portraits of local deputies or of those worth notice because of their devotion to the revolutionary cause. A stone from the ruins of the Bastille or from the vast exploitation of palloy¹ occupied a place of honour.

In some were "obelisks" bearing the names of "true defenders of the common weal and of philosophy." Elsewhere was to be found the painted or sculptured image of the King, of certain famous men: Rousseau, Franklin, and, after his death, Mirabeau.²

Finally, in the bay behind the president's chair were latter placed the national colours and the flags of a few nations who were friends of liberty: England,³ the United States, Poland.

After August 10th there had been written above the platform of the bureau at Saint-Jean-de-Luz these words: "Hatred to Kings! Love to the French Republic!" The slogan which seems to have been the most generally adopted was: "Liberty, equality, fraternity, or death!"

In principle all members wore a red bonnet, though in certain cases this obligation only applied to the members of the bureau.

Sometimes a relic of the old regime ornamented the hall as a trophy—for instance, at Grenoble the tapestries of the *Palais de Justice*. Statues of liberty of its martyrs, the lists of the defenders of the nation and of citizens who made donations for the volunteers, etc., completed the decoration of the hall, the furnishings of which were modest, as in most cases those who wished to be seated had to bring their own seats.

Here—again taken from the same author—is the usual agenda of the club meeting:

1. Roll call.

2. Acclamations: "Vive la Montagne! Perissent les

1 Palloy, charged with the demolition of the Bastille, made a fortune by selling the stones of the royal fortress. (One is to be found at the Montreuil Museum.)

2 These were withdrawn when the treason of Mirabeau became known. On the other hand, there were placed in the meeting places busts of the "martyrs," victims of the counter-revolution: Chalier, Montagnard Mayor of Ryon, Marat, and Lepelletier—saint-Fargeau.

3 This was before the war with England.

tyrans! Vive la liberte!" (Long live the Montagnards! Perish the tyrants! Long live liberty!)

3. Republican prayers or hymns to liberty.
4. Reception of citizens belonging to societies in other towns, officers in transit,¹ representatives of the people on missions, high functionaries on tours of inspection, etc.
5. Minutes of the previous meeting.
6. Reading of correspondence and newspapers.
7. Admission of members; affiliations.
8. Discussions of questions on the order of the day.
9. Reports and denunciations.
10. Lecture by an orator previously designated.
11. Hymn to liberty.
12. Acclamations.

After the defeat of the 9th Thermidor, the popular societies attempted to organize resistance. The Society of Jacobins had declared its solidarity with Robespierre. Men such as Tallien and Freron, the authors of the conspiracy, were expelled from the Jacobins of Paris. But the Thermidorean Convention was vigilant. They started by forbidding to popular societies "all affiliations, aggregations, federations and all correspondence in a collective name between societies, as subversive to the government and contrary to the unity of the Republic." Finally, the Club of the Jacobins, and afterwards all popular societies, were dissolved. With Babeuf, however, the tradition of the popular clubs continued. The friends of Babeuf constituted the Club of the Pantheon, which the Directory closed in February, 1796, and later the Society of the Equals, which was dissolved after the defeat of the Babeuvistes.

Notwithstanding, the popular societies, with the Jacobin clubs, had ensured the victory of the Revolution. In difficult moments, their agency ensured the unity of France. They gave the first example of a people's party. Without their collaboration, without their united support, the Committee of Public Safety would never have been able to accomplish its mission and to crush the enemy without and within.

From this brief study two essential conclusions can be drawn:

1 It should be remembered that the right was given to soldiers to form their own popular societies or to be members of civilian societies.

1. The history of the Parisian Sections and the popular societies bears witness to the creative power of the people. The Sections, originally, were only administrative and electoral organs. The clubs were only tiny academic sects. But from these Sections and these clubs our people evolved living democratic associations which, firstly, organized the struggle against the defenders of the feudal system and then ensured the victory of the revolutionary government. This French initiative, immortalized by the historical epoch which it achieved, can be compared with another initiative:

“In those stormy days of the October political strikes, in the fire of the struggle against Tsardom, the revolutionary creative initiative of the working-class masses forged a new and powerful weapon—the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies.”¹

2. This history reminds us, therefore, that there can be no progressive government which is not allied with the people. To-day there is developing the following theory: when the country is in danger, the people's voice must be silenced, parliament put to sleep, and obstacles to the right of assembly multiplied. This theory is not of Jacobin inspiration. In the years 1793-4, during which the frontiers were overrun, the Jacobins thought that there was no salvation without contact with the popular masses. They obtained support from the Sections of Paris and the popular societies, and, let it not be forgotten, *it is for this reason that at the same time they saved France and democracy.*

¹ History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Bolsheviks, p. 79.

THE WORKING CLASS IN THE REVOLUTION OF 1789

By Etienne Fajon

Deputy Of The Seine

THE French Revolution of 1789 was a bourgeois democratic revolution. It abolished feudal conditions of production, property relations which hindered the further growth of capitalist industry, commerce and economy which had developed within feudal society. It wrested power from the hands of the nobility and passed it over into the hands of a new class—the bourgeoisie. In this sense it was a bourgeois revolution.

However, the Revolution of 1789 was not the work of the rising bourgeoisie alone. It was a revolution in which "the mass of the people in its majority, its lowest and most profound social strata, marked by the yoke and by exploitation, rose spontaneously and stamped on the course of the revolution the seal of their demands, their attempts to construct in their own manner a new society in place of the old one they were destroying" (Lenin). In this sense it was a popular democratic revolution.

To-day, when there is inscribed on the agenda of history a new revolution, a proletarian revolution tending to abolish historically doomed capitalist relations and to establish the power of the working class allied to the entire toiling population, it is of interest to examine the place occupied by the working class—the wage-earners—in French society in 1789 and the role this class played in the Great Revolution.

The French working class was born with capitalist production and developed with it. It grew with the discovery of new markets (America, India, China) at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and then with the development of industry in the seventeenth century.

Nevertheless, the French working class on the eve of 1789 was very different from the French working class of to-day. It was still a nascent class, while to-day France has 10,984,000 wage-earners in industry and commerce, or

just over half of the active population (Census of 1931). Most historians estimate the number of French proletarians in 1789 at 600,000 out of a population of 25 million.

The most important industrial towns at this time were Marseilles, with 80,000 wage-earners (sugar, soap, spirits, cotton, prints); Lyons, with 58,000 (principally sink); Rheims and St. Quentin, with a textile industry occupying 60,000 workers of both sexes; (Bordeaux (refineries and shipbuilding); Rouen and Lille (textiles). Paris was mainly a centre of artisan handicraft. In so far as mining and metallurgical centres are concerned, if they included important sections of the wage-earners in 1789, they can in no way be compared with what they have since become.

Twenty times less numerous than to-day, the French working class was still in 1789 widely dispersed. True, the introduction of machinery had begun. Textile industry had already 900 spinning jennies; the Compagnie Miniere d'Anzin was equipped with twelve steam engines. Capitalist concentration, daughter of mechanization, was already apparent in the textile industry (1,200 workers employed at the Van Robais Factory at Abbeville) and in the mines (4,000 workers at the d'Anzin Mine).

But these were only signs—harbingers of large-scale centralized industries. The system of corporations, the feudal barriers, inhibited capitalist competition and therewith the investment of capital. Small industry remained the dominant form of urban economy. For example 2,287 workers of Orleans were employed by fifty-five independent enterprises in the manufacture of stockings. That is to say, the working-class population of the country was scattered and separated.

Moreover, in the France of 1789, the forms of exploitation of the proletariat did not afford the same unity as in our time. The proletariat fell into distinct groups; chief of which were the factory workers and craftsmen. The former worked in enterprises where the social character of production and the division between the capitalist and the working class had already emerged.

The latter worked on their own, or in small groups for masters, themselves needy and exploited by the merchants. In most cases they ate and slept at their master's

place and shared his humble lot, so that class antagonism between employers and proletarians was only obscurely revealed. In these conditions, the proletariat lacked that homogeneity without which it cannot acquire a knowledge of its collective force and its class interests.

Many pages would be necessary to describe in detail the conditions of life and labour of the working class in the various districts of France in 1789. We will content ourselves with showing how miserable were the conditions by giving a few examples. The working day in general was sixteen hours, from four in the morning till eight at night. Craftsmen—as, for instance, printers—worked only fourteen hours, but these were exceptions.

These are the figures of daily wages: on the average, masons earned 2.30 *francs* a day; weavers of Moselle 75 *centimes*; labourers at Bourg 1 *franc 28 centimes*; a Breton spinner (female) 30 *centimes*; a fully qualified miner 1 *franc* to 1 *franc 28 centimes*.

As to the approximate purchasing power of these wages, the following prices will give some indication: in 1788 a kilogramme of meat cost 1 *franc 10 centimes* in Paris and 65 *centimes* throughout the country; a kilogramme of butter in Pais cost 1 *franc 28 centimes*. In general, the average daily wage equalled the price of 6 pounds of bread.

The wage-earners saw their conditions continually growing worse. The rise in the cost of living was constantly greater than the eventual increase in wages. Meat and wine seldom found their way to working-class tables Henri See, the historian, states "that in each period of crisis a great number of workers were positively driven to beggary,"

Such were the conditions of the workers of France on the eve of the Revolution of 1789.

What were the special demands of the French workers in this situation and how were they manifested?

The *Cahier de Doleances* of 1789, so rich in content, only give a feeble echo of any wage demands.

In the towns the *cahiers* were in general drawn up by the most educated, best organized, most class-conscious elements of the *Tiers-Etat*—by the bourgeois. As a rule, the workers took no part in the electoral assemblies. In Paris, for instance, the electoral qualification was assessment for

direct taxation at 6 *livres*, which excluded from the electoral assemblies all the 80,000 poorest toilers and therefore most of the workers.

The working class of 1789 possessed neither the numbers, organizations or the collective consciousness which would have enabled it to put its stamp on the elections to the *States-General*.

Nevertheless, a number of *cahiers* gave some place to the workers' demands. The *cahier* of the *Tiers-Etat* of Mareil ". . . also request that the daily rates of labourers shall be increased in accordance with the price of wheat. When wheat cost only 20 *livres*, they earned 20 *sous*;¹ to-day it costs as much as 40—42 *livres* and they still only earn 20 *sous*; therefore the father of a family cannot live and keep his family."

Already the idea of a sliding scale of wages was being expressed.

The *cahier* of Meudon says it would be better ". . . to permit the people to work by suppressing certain holidays than to put them in the position where through idleness they give themselves up to debauchery."

The spinners of Caen considered ". . . that the machines are a serious prejudice to the poor people—they reduce the price for spinning to nought, and therefore the spinners request their suppression."

The destruction of the machines. Such was the primitive demand of the nascent proletariat. Not till the next century did they acquire a Socialist conscience, learning from the scientific Socialism of Marx and Engels that their attack must be directed against the capitalist system of exploitation and not against the modern instruments of production.

Nevertheless, on the eve of the Revolution of 1789 there were struggles between the wage-earners and the capitalists over working-class demands, mainly concerning wages. There were the strikes of the weavers of Lyons in 1744, 1779, and 1788, the last spreading also to the masons and hatters. There was a violent conflict at the end of April, 1789, in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in Paris, provoked by the industrialist Reveillon, who was accused in an electoral assembly of the *Tiers-Etat* of having conceived a plan for the general lowering of workers' wages.

¹ One *sou* equals approximately 1 half-penny; 20 *sous*—1 franc.

These labour conflicts were often extremely violent. (In 1744 the workers of Lyons were masters of the town for several days, and the struggle resulted in the death sentence and condemnation to the galleys.) But their common characteristic was that they were local and spontaneous: inclusive organization with a policy uniting the working class of France being at that date totally lacking. There existed journeymen's societies, grouping some of the workers, but they spent more time on questions connected with labour competition than in the struggle against the employers.

A rising class, small in number, dispersed, heterogeneous, ignorant of its future and often also of its immediate interests, badly organized—such was the working class on the eve of 1789.

During the following century—century of capitalist expansion—it multiplied, became concentrated in giant factories, became organized, conscious at last of its historic role in the struggle for the liberation of humanity.

In 1789 a different stage of social development was in question. In the overthrow of feudalism, in the epoch of ascendant capitalism, it was to the bourgeoisie, then revolutionary and progressive, that the leading role had to belong. The rising proletariat in this struggle could only play a supporting role.

"At this stage the labourers still form an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition. If anywhere they unite to form more compact bodies, this is not yet the consequence of their own active union, but of the union of the bourgeoisie, which class, in order to attain its own political ends, is compelled to set the whole proletariat in motion, and is moreover yet for a time able to do so. At this stage, therefore, the proletarians do not fight their enemies, but the enemies of their enemies. . . . Thus the whole historical movement is concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie; every victory so obtained is a victory for the bourgeoisie."¹

In this way we obtain a general view of the French working class in 1789; we learn its place and its role in the strata of French society then about to give battle to the *old regime*.

¹ **Manifesto of the Communist Party**, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, p. 17 (Lawrence and Wishart, Ltd.).

However, the relations between the various classes did not remain static during the years of the Revolution. These relations were modified continually as the social situation underwent a succession of rapid changes all through the revolutionary epoch. We must consider from the point of view of the working class some of the decisive moments of the Great Revolution.

July 14th, 1789, with the fall of the Bastille, was the first of the great revolutionary days.

The storming of the Bastille was the work of the people of Paris as a whole: bourgeois, artisans, and workers. Among those who led the movement were industrialists, professional officers, petty-bourgeois. Carpenters played an active role during the battle. Of one hundred killed in the attack, several dozens were workers.

Here we have the picture of the first months of the Revolution. All the classes were united against feudalism; the proletariat participated in the struggle, the bourgeoisie led it.

Yet while the bourgeoisie made use of working-class support to break down the obstacles the feudal system presented to its industry and commerce, it had no intention of allowing the Revolution to develop further. It was opposed to the economic demands of the workers; it was opposed to the political rights demanded by the popular masses, who under the Constituent especially were denied the right of voting.

In the spring of 1791 the building workers of Paris fought for an amelioration of their deplorable conditions. The representatives of the industrial bourgeoisie, masters of the Constituent, on June 14th, passed the famous Le Chapelier Act. This law forbade the workers to associate or organize; it laid down heavy fines and terms of imprisonment against workers who violated its provisions. It was one of the first manifestations of class egoism by exploiters newly promoted to power. A month later, on July 17th, when the workers and petty-bourgeois were demanding the dethronement of Louis XVI and the extension of political rights, the National Guard, commanded by La Fayette, opened fire without warning on a big crowd assembled at the Champ de Mars. Fifty toilers were killed.

From this time onwards the Revolution entered a new phase. The struggle against the old regime ran concurrently

with a new struggle: that of the big bourgeoisie against the workers, the artisans and the popular masses fighting under the banner of the Republic and of democracy.

Marat, that great revolutionary seemed to have had a prescintiment of the class antagonism of the future when he proclaimed on May 8th, 1791:

"Never expect anything from men, rich and opulent, men brought up in luxury and pleasure, men full of cupidity who like only gold; it is not from hardened slaves that one makes free citizens. There are only the farmers, the small merchants, the artisans and the workers, the labourers and the proletarians, as the insolent rich call them, who can constitute a free people, impatient under the yoke of oppression and always ready to throw it off."

The accomplishments of the Constituent are clearly characteristic of this double aspect of class contradictions. The Constituent achieved an eminently progressive task in destroying the judicial basis of feudal society; but the Constitution of 1791 which it drafted was designed to give all power to the rich and none to the people; it excluded from participation in political life and in the National Guard the "passive" citizens, who did not pay a specified minimum tax—that is, in practice, the proletarians. The right of election to the Legislative Assembly was open only to the rich citizens paying at least 54 *livres* in taxes.

Lenin has compared the day of August 10th, 1792, to July 14th, 1789. As he notes, August 10th marked the beginning of the real popular democratic revolution. On July 14th the workers fought against feudalism side by side with the whole of the bourgeoisie. On August 10th it was the popular masses of Paris (the workers of Faubourg Saint-Marceau at their head), in collaboration with the Federals of the provinces (especially those of Marseilles), who captured the Tuileries by storm. The big bourgeoisie, whose representatives formed a majority of the Legislative Assembly, were hostile to the movement.

From the point of view of the working class, the events of August 10th have considerable importance. The popular movement forced the Legislative Assembly to decide at last to summon a National Convention elected by universal suffrage. For the first time, the working class had the right

to vote. In the following month the intervention of the workers and the popular masses resulted in the victory of Valmy and the proclamation of the Republic by the first sitting of the Convention.

The life history of the Convention is one of domination by the policy of the representatives of the popular masses, the Jacobins, the policy of ruthless struggle against the external enemy: against the armies of the King of Prussia and the Emperor of Austria; against the internal enemy; against the rebellions, the plots, the conspiracies to restore the monarchy, allies of foreign monarchs.

The policy of the Jacobins could only be imposed by hurling from power the representatives of the rich bourgeoisie—the Girondins, who were in favour of appeasement, of collaborating with the residue of the nobility and the agents of foreign Powers, against the popular masses.

The Jacobins were able to seize power and crush the enemies of the Revolution within the frontiers and without, because they based themselves on the popular masses.

Lenin, in his polemic with Plekhanov, emphasized that—

“ . . . the Convention was precisely the dictatorship of the lower people—that is to say, the lowest social strata of the poorer masses of the towns and countryside. In the bourgeois revolution it was the organ of sovereign power, in which the dominating factor entirely and without division was neither the big or middle bourgeoisie, but the lower orders, the poor elements—that is to say, precisely what we call the proletariat and the peasants.”

In this revolutionary activity of the people, the working class, particularly of Paris, played a specially important part.

On May 31st, 1793, the workers supplied a majority of the armed citizens who invaded the Convention and so paved the way for June 2nd, the day of the fall of the Girondins, the victory of the *sans-culottes* over the rich bourgeoisie. Following this, they held their place in the foremost ranks of the struggle against reaction.

The year 1793 was the year of victory against foreign intervention. The working class was a decisive factor in the organization of this victory.

Participation in the *levee en masse* of August, 1793, was not the only contribution made by the workers to the salvation of national independence and the safeguarding of French liberties. To the general task of the whole people of supplying soldiers was added the special and decisive task of producing arms.

The Committee of Public Safety was delegated in effect on August 23rd, 1793, "to take all necessary measures to establish without delay an extraordinary manufacture of arms of all kinds to correspond with the upsurging energy of the French people." The working class responded to the call of the Revolution with enthusiasm.

Thanks to their creative initiative, the workers of France were soon able to increase the production of arms tenfold. On November 3rd, 1793, a delegation from a new Parisian factory presented to the Convention the first six muskets manufactured, and promised that they would speedily produce 1,000 muskets per day. The three old royal factories which produced 650 muskets a month in 1791 produced 16,000 per month in 1794.

The same miracles, as a result of working day and night, were accomplished in the manufacture of gunpowder. At the arsenal of Grenoble alone, no less than 20,000 kilogrammes were produced per day.

In this way, in mass demonstrations as in the battle-field, in the factories as in the Army, already in 1792 the working class was revealing itself as the decisive factor for national independence and the safeguarding of liberty.

While here we cannot analyse minutely the causes of the return to the offensive of the reactionaries on 9th Thermidor, it is necessary to emphasize that a too formal application of the maximum-price law (September 29th, 1793) to workers' wages was bound to alienate popular support from the policy of Robespierre, and so eventually facilitate the fall of the Incorruplicable—an event which preluded the effacement of Republic for half a century.

Notwithstanding this, the Convention accomplished the essentials of a bourgeois-democratic Revolution in France. It proclaimed the abolition, without indemnity, of feudal rights; it overthrew the regime of landed property; it established equality before the law and affirmed the right of all to education.

During the flood tide of the Revolution, the working class poured forth treasures of initiative and heroism. But, although actively participating in the destruction of feudalism, the working class could not then gain an insight into its own destiny—the historical role incumbent upon it to abolish all class domination, all exploitation of man by man, and to create the Communist society of the future.

Capitalist society had not developed far enough in 1789 for its fundamental laws to be distinguishable. Moreover, the methods of scientific analysis had not then been sufficiently perfected to permit their successful application to the complex phenomena of social life.

Nevertheless, the first signs of the antagonism between capital and labour which developed in this period during the liquidation of feudal relations inspired those men who were more advanced and nearest to the working class with prospects of the future, which scientific Socialism, sixty years later, was able to correct and develop in the light of scientific knowledge.

Let us content ourselves with citing the greatest of the forerunners of Communism in the Revolution of 1789—Gracchus Babeuf. Babeuf foresaw the historic role of the working class. As Jaurès observes in his *Histoire Socialiste de la Revolution Francaise*:

“Babeuf found support especially among the factory workers. When he founded his club, it was at the Pantheon, at a point which was at the same time the centre of the Saint-Marcel quarter with its taverns and the Saint-Antoine quarter with its numerous and powerful factories.”

One of the merits of Babeuf, according to Engels, was to have drawn the “final conclusion from the idea of equality embodied in the Constitution of 1793”—that is to say, to have understood that social equality cannot exist while society is divided into classes and the exploitation of man by man is permitted.

Consequently, Babeuf saw in the Revolution of 1789 “only the forerunner of another revolution”—of the Socialist revolution, which would be the last, as it would free society finally from all class antagonisms.

Moreover, drawing the moral from the bourgeois-democratic Revolution of 1789, Babeuf foresaw that the working class and the popular masses would have to have recourse to the same dictatorial methods to bring to an end the domination of capital. The notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat—dictatorship over the exploiting minority, with democracy without limit for the popular masses—existed in germ in the doctrine of Babeuf.

True, the Communism of Babeuf was born before its time. His conspiracy ended in failure and he himself was guillotined on May 17th, 1797. His projects were necessarily utopian. Speaking of Babeuf, Marx and Engels wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*:

"The first direct attempts of the proletariat to attain its own ends made in times of universal excitement, when feudal society was being overthrown, these attempts necessarily failed owing to the then undeveloped state of the proletariat, as well as to the absence of the economic conditions for its emancipation, conditions that had yet to be produced and could be produced by the impending bourgeois epoch alone. The revolutionary literature that accompanied these first movements of the proletariat had necessarily a reactionary character. It inculcated universal asceticism and social levelling in its crudest form."¹

But Marx showed elsewhere the importance of the ideas and activity of Babeuf and the forerunners of Communism in France:

"The French Revolution gave birth to notions which went beyond the ideas of the established state of things. The revolutionary movement, which in 1789, which the *Cercle Social*, which found its main representatives in the course of its evolution, Leclerc and Roux, and finished with the conspiracy of Babeuf, gave birth to the Communist notions which Buonarotti, friend of Babeuf, reintroduced into France after the Revolution of 1830. This idea enhanced by its consequences, is the Idea of the new state of things."

¹ *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Fr. Engels, Preface, p. 7. 8
(Lawrence and Wishart, Ltd.).

In this way the Revolution of 1789 not only brought about the end of feudal absolutism, but introduced the principles of democracy to France and to the world.

By liberating the productive forces from feudal trammels, it opened the way to the development of capitalist production and, concurrently to the rapid progress in numbers, in organization and in class consciousness of the modern proletariat.

Just as the ideas of Babeuf were the forerunners of scientific Socialism—the perfected doctrine of the working class of to-day—so the far-distant struggles between labour and capital, 150 years ago, were only a prelude to the co-ordinated and organized activity of millions of workers in our time.

To-day, in consequence, the prodigious modern developments of the productive forces, the capitalist relations of production have become an obstacle to further human progress, which was the position of the feudal relationship of production in 1789.

Social production demands for its development a corresponding social ownership of the major means of production, and it is for this reason that the working class fights to make an end of capitalist domination, as the bourgeoisie fought in 1789 to end feudal domination.

The victorious working class will not, however, substitute for existing class antagonisms new ones corresponding to a new stage of social development. On the contrary, the class struggle has—

“now reached a stage where the exploited and oppressed class—the proletariat—cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class—the bourgeoisie—without at the same time and once and for all emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression and class distinctions and class struggle.”¹

¹ *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, p. 35 (Lawrence and Wishart, Ltd.).

THE ROLE OF THE PEASANTS IN THE REVOLUTION

By Paul Bouthonnier

Professor Of History

THE peasants played a tremendous role in 1789 and during the Revolution. They constituted, in fact, the great mass of the population and they were interested to the highest degree in the overthrow of the feudal order which for centuries had kept them in a state of servitude. Accordingly, they were one of the principal motive forces of the irresistible movement which gave birth to bourgeois society.

Also they had to fight vigorously to obtain the complete abolition, without indemnity, of feudal rights and to get some share of the lands which until then they had cultivated for the profit of the ecclesiastical and lay nobility. But while they managed to free the soil and themselves from age-old exploitation, many peasants were unable to acquire land.

The bourgeoisie, eager to seize political power to assure a free development for capitalist production, took no notice of the fondness of millions of peasants for the soil. They needed an abundant labour force freed from feudal bonds, and this landless multitude offered it to them. It is therefore understandable that the bourgeoisie resisted measures which aimed at giving land to the poor peasants, and that they obstructed the agrarian projects of the Jacobins, who dreamed of founding an equalitarian society of small agrarian proprietors. Nevertheless, it must not be deduced from this that the peasants as a whole gained comparatively little from the Revolution, or that only the bourgeoisie really profited from the disappearance of the old regime.

On the contrary, the progress achieved by our people one hundred and fifty years ago in liberating the peasants from the feudal yoke and by setting up the Rights of Man and Citizen in place of royal despotism and the prerogatives of the nobility, opened a way for the peasants as well as for the proletarians—to the road of final emancipation.

The French Peasants on the Eve of the Revolution

Of the 24 to 25 million inhabitants of French at the end of the eighteenth century, some 22 millions were peasants—92 per cent. of the total population. These figures show how important for the Revolution was the movement in the countryside.

Since the Middle Ages, the situation of the peasants had changed greatly. On the eve of the Revolution there remained only 1 million serfs spread over a few provinces (Normandy, Franche-Comte, Lorraine, Berry, Nivernais, Auvergne). Yet the regime of feudal property persisted. In fact, the whole land, directly or indirectly, was an appanage of the feudal lords.

It is for this reason that, to understand the scope of the revolutionary uprising of the peasants in 1789, it is necessary first of all to know how the land was distributed and what were the charges with which it was burdened.

The nobility and the clergy owned vast domains.

The nobles in Orleanais, for example, owned 40 per cent. of the land; in Burgundy, 35 per cent.; in Toulousain, 28 per cent.; in the Landes, 22 per cent; in Picardy, 33 per cent.; in Artois and in Bearn, 20 per cent. In Haute Bretagne, Normandy, Poitou, Ile-de-France, their domains were more extensive than in the other provinces.

The clergy in the Nord owned 40 per cent. of the area; in Laonais, 29 per cent.; in Picardy, 18 per cent.; in Burgundy, 11 per cent.; in Berry, 10 per cent. Everywhere the convents, the abbeys, and bishoprics were endowed with the best land.

The bourgeois businessmen, manufacturers and financiers also had their farms and *chateaux* near the towns.

The well-to-do peasants, the "husbandmen," relatively few, cultivated "holdings" which they could sell or bequeath. These holdings accounted for half the land in Limousin and Languedoc; two-third in Dauphiny, one-third in the Nord, Picardy, Artois, Orleanais, and Burgundy; one-fifth in Poitou, Normandy, and Brittany.

Throughout the whole country were to be found peasants with holdings so small that they were insufficient for their subsistence. They were obliged during part of the time to work at home for manufacturing merchants, or to go out as day labourers.

Finally, there was the great mass of the rural population which owned nothing: tenant-farmers, *metayers*, labourers, servants, and serfs.

Yet, whatever their condition all these peasants were subjected to the lord of the fief on which they lived, under obligations which were often heavy and always vexatious, from which they could not escape.

They had to carry out statute-labour and pay tolls. They were forced to take their grain to the manor mill, their grapes, nuts, and olives to the manor press; their bread had to be baked at the manor bakery. The manor agents, charged with collecting the feudal dues, robbed them with shameless impunity, since justice was administered in the manor court. They had no right to destroy the game which ruined their crops. The lord of the manor could prevent the peasants from selling their harvest of wheat or wine until he had hold his. The lords demanded that their vassals should deliver their dues in kind at the manor granaries or store-rooms, before gathering in their own share from the fields.

The "freeholders" did not possess full ownership rights. The land was burdened with fixed and perpetual dues, known as the *cens* when paid in cash, and the *champart* when sent in kind. Every removal was subject to dues (*lods ou vente*). Each new holder had to be accepted by the lord of the manor. The revenue was imprescriptible and the peasants of a given parish were responsible collectively for the dues of those who were insolvent.

Varying according to provinces, every ten, twenty, or thirty years the lord of the manor collected a *droit d'aveu* (right of avowal), a testimony of the dependence of the holder on the lord.

The Church, in its turn, received tithes, which amounted to a tenth or thirteenth of the main crops.

The King's taxes, *taille*, *capitation*, *vingtièmes*, *aids*, *gabelles*, were extremely heavy. They represented in Saintonge a quarter of the annual income, in Limousin a third, and in Bordelais 36 per cent.

All these charges crushed the peasants, whom dearth was reducing to famine. The population of the countryside fed badly. The poorest never ate their fill. Housing conditions were deplorable; in most cases the people and the beasts lived in unheard of promiscuity. Scarlet fever, small-

pox, typhus, and typhoid claimed thousands of victims every year. In 1741 there were no fewer than 80,000 deaths in Brittany alone.

During the Middle Ages, the peasants had fought to free themselves from servitude. Under absolute monarchy they rose on numerous occasions against the royal taxes or the feudal dues. In 1662 in Boulonnais they took up arms against a new tax. In Bearn in 1664 they rose against the *gabelle*. In Guyenne in 1675 they protested against the stamped-papers, the increase of the *gabelle*, and the tobacco monopoly. At the same time, Lower Brittany also revolted against new taxes, and at this time, the Jacquerie¹ attacked the feudal privileges. In the parishes, lists of demands, the peasants' code, were drawn up, forerunners of the *Cahiers de Doleances* of 1789. The repression of these revolts was ferocious.

Therefore the peasants, even when they appeared to be quiet nourished a deep hatred against their oppressors. This hatred continually increased in their latter years of the *ancien régime* as a result of a feudal offensive which worsened the servitude of the countryside.

Throughout the kingdom the nobility attempted to revive so-called rights which were superadded to those already in force, and in this they found support even in the *parlement*. They attacked communal property which up to then had been enjoyed by the peasant communities. They placed the collection of their dues in the hands of Farmer-Generals, who inflicted fresh exactions on the villages.

The hopes which developed among the peasants at the news that the *States-General* were being called will therefore be understood.

It is not intended in this study to deal with the elections or the drawing-up *Cahiers de Doleances*, but simply to recall the essential demands of the peasants so as to be better able to draw up the balance-sheet of result obtained during the Revolution.

The peasants were unanimous in 1789 in demanding the abolition of feudal dues and that everyone should be liable to taxes in proportion to his fortune and income. These were the reforms which at the time they had most at heart.

¹ Illegal organisation of "Jacques"—peasants—against their temporal and spiritual feudal lords. The first big peasant rising against feudal ex-actions and oppression was organised by the Jacquerie in 1358.

Later, when Church estates and those of the emigrants were put up for sale, the landless peasants demanded that each should be given an opportunity to obtain without charge, or at least at a low price, a share of this land paid in annual instalments.

The Struggle for the Abolition of Feudal Rights

The abolition of feudal rights did not come about automatically. The peasants had to fight to obtain it. The nobility and higher clergy, in their class egotism, did everything they could to preserve their privileges.

From the day of meeting of the *States-General*, the peasants, who by rioting against the hoarders of wheat and commodities of prime necessity had shown during the elections how determined they were to bring about an improvement of their miserable lot, followed closely the happenings at Versailles.

They were not slow to grasp the manœuvres of the Court and the aristocrats against representatives of the *Tiers*. Rumours of a plot against the representatives of the people spread quickly throughout the provinces. As the news spread that the Bastille had been captured, the movement developed rapidly into a general revolt. Everywhere the peasants refused to meet their feudal obligations. They assembled in their parishes, invaded the *chateaux*, and destroyed ancient title-deeds and records of their feudal subordination.

The nobles and the princes of the Church were smitten with panic. Only one thing was left for them to do: they could accept the accomplished fact and at the same time try to salvage what they could from the wreck.

The matter was raised in the Constituent Assembly. On August 3rd, 1789, the delegate of its Committee of Reports depicted the situation. The reporter could not conceal the extremity of his alarm. He condemned the action of the peasants in slanderous terms:

“It would appear,” he declared, “that property, no matter what its importance, is the prey of the most culpable brigandage: on all sides *chateaux* are being burnt down, convents destroyed, farms abandoned to pillage. Taxes, feudal rights, everything is destroyed. It is not

possible to enforce the law. Justice is nothing but a phantom which one seeks at the tribunals in vain."

Nevertheless, what else could be done in the face of a popular movement of such violence but to give it satisfaction.

On August 4th two great feudal lords, the Viscount de Noailles and the Duke d'Aiguillon, proposed to make the best out of the situation. The Viscount de Noailles, father-in-law of La Fayette, submitted to the Assembly the following resolution, which was accepted:

1. "That it shall be declared in a proclamation by the Committee that the representatives of the Nation have decided that taxes will be paid by all persons in the kingdom in proportion to their income.
2. "That all public expenditure will in future be borne equally by all.
3. "That all feudal rights are redeemable by the communities in cash on a just valuation, either by a lump sum or by annual payments proportioned to a ten-years' average income of the commune.
4. "That statute-labour to the lord of the manor, mortmain, and other personal servitudes will be abolished without compensation."

On August 6th the Constituent adopted the following final text:

"The National Assembly abolishes the feudal regime entirely; it decrees that rights and duties, whether feudal or of quit-rent, those appertaining to real or personal mortmain and to personal servitude or substitutes for, are abolished without indemnity. All other customary obligations are redeemable and the price and method of repurchase will be determined by the National Assembly. Those extinguishable rights which are not suppressed by this decree will continue to be enforceable until they have been redeemed."

On August 11th, the Constituent suppressed the tithes. What was the implication of the decree adopted by the Assembly? Certainly, in principle, the feudal regime was abolished, and this was an achievement of importance. Yet the clause on the redeemability of the rights of burdening the land was in practice equivalent to maintaining them. The

peasants had no means by which to redeem them. And to reach a settlement of the value of the rights and the mode of payment of the indemnity involved a complicated legal process. In this way the privileged were able to save quite considerable incomes. The representatives of the rich bourgeoisie, scared by the impetuous revolt of the peasants, had rallied to the aid of the threatened aristocrats.

As can be easily imagined, the disillusionment of the countryside had great repercussions. The anger of the peasants was increased by the decree of the Constituent of March 15th 1790, which worsened for them the provisions adopted in August, 1789.

As a result of pressure from the privileged, it was decided to incorporate in the category of redeemable rights certain personal servitudes (*lods ou ventes*) which had been commuted into periodical cash payments.

It further decided that a lord's total of multifarious rights must be bought out as a single whole or not at all. This, in effect, made redemption virtually impossible because of the great sums involved.

Furthermore, the lords of the manor were authorized to collect their dues without having to prove them. It was the tenant who had to prove whether a claim was unlawful.

New incidents occurred. The administrators of the Department of Lot drew the Assembly's attention on September 22nd, 1790, to what took place during the collection of feudal dues.

The administrators of Lot, who were good bourgeois, had addressed a proclamation to the peasants exhorting them in the name of the law to remain calm and submissive. But the peasants, at the end of their patience, would not listen. In many communes they prevented the municipal officers from reading the proclamation. Other communes, the administrators declared, "had returned to that uniform resign of insurrection which, at the beginning of the year, manifested itself in our part of the kingdom." "In several communes," they lament, "gibbets have been set up for those who pay their dues and those who collect them."

The directory of the Department of Seine-et-Marne reported at the same time "the end of the troubles in the district of Nemours brought about by the refusal of feudal dues."

In January, 1791, a deputy of Perigord, Loys, described

in a memorandum to the Constituent the obstinacy and solidarity with which the peasants resisted the payment of dues in Perigord, Quercy, and the district of Boulogne.

"All the peasants," he stated, "refuse to pay the dues; they assemble, they form coalitions, they take decisions that none shall pay dues and that if anyone does they will be hanged.

"They go to the houses of the lords, the ecclesiastics, and other comfortable people. There they carry out destruction, force the return of as many of the dues as have been collected, extort acknowledgements and engagements from those who have sold the wheat collected, since they pretend this debt has been covered by *lots et ventes* and other rights which were not due from them."

Nevertheless, the Constituent did not modify its policy.

The Legislative, soon, after its opening (October 1st. 1791), had to face new difficulties. This Assembly, composed of deputies elected on a restricted suffrage, and of which the Girondins, spokesmen of the wealthy commercial and financial bourgeoisie, were the dominating force, delayed as long as they could the reforms demanded by the peasants.

But the peasants were near the boiling point. The country's internal and external situation was becoming more complex and was giving rise to grave apprehension. The peasants knew that the aristocrats and the rich, the King and the court were ready for any treachery that would restore the feudal system and despotism. In an address to the Legislative dated December 15th, 1791, citizens of Lourmarin (Bouches-du-Rhone) admirably stated their sentiments:

"We proclaim," they declared, "with profound joy that the destruction of the feudal system will be a death blow to the aristocrats. It is in the hope of re-establishing it that they emigrate, conspire, and agitate in all directions. You will feel more than ever that liberty and feudalism cannot exist together."

It was hard in fact for Jacques Bonhomme¹ to keep up his dues or payments to a lord who had crossed the frontier to join the army of the counter-revolution. And how was

¹ Jacques Bonhomme—literally, "Jimmy Goodfellow"—conventional name for the ordinary countryman.

he to find the means or redeeming these unjust claims? This question was put with moving force in a petition covered with signatures and sent to the Legislative by the district of Chateaubriand (Loire-Inferieure):

"Must it be necessary," asked the petitioners, "for a miserable vassal to sell part of his small heritage from his fathers to exempt the rest from slavery and oppression? But to whom would he sell that part of his heritage? To the so-called lord? To his former tyrants? They alone by the redemption of feudal dues will be the depositaries of all the finance of France and concentrate in their hands all its wealth!"

Another document from the commune of Capelle-Brion (Lot-et-Garonne) underlined the gravity of the problem. It declared with force that—

"the feudal rights conserved and declared redeemable by the decree of March 17th, 1791, are such as will provoke civil war if the National Assembly in its wisdom does not take steps to modify these exactions basically and to alter the mode of redemption decreed by the Constituent Assembly."

And the signatories went as far as to declare that "the peasants will oppose force to force," since the sacrifice of their lives will cost them nothing.

The Jacobins, who opposed the anti-popular policy of the Girondins, fought for the people of the countryside as well as for those of the towns. In a powerful speech, Couthon, deputy of Puy-de-Dome, friend of Robespierre, on February 29th, 1792, made himself the spokesman of the just indignation of the peasants.

"Messieurs," he commenced, "we are reaching the moment when perhaps, arms in hand, we will have to defend our liberty against the combined efforts of the tyrants. We will preserve it: it would be a crime to doubt it. A great people when it resolves to be free is invincible. Either it will crush its enemies or it will leave to the conqueror nothing but a wasted desert."

"We have an imposing army, both in regular troops and in national guards; but this army, I predict, will not have the strength to give effect to our desires unless the nation is at one with it, and the people, well disposed, are united to it in will and if need be, in action."

"It is therefore this moral strength of the people, more powerful than that of armies, it is this general conviction so essential to order and the happiness of all that the National Assembly must evoke and must secure before all else."

Couthon went on to say that many fine speeches had been made to bind the people, but the Revolution required, not speeches, but just and beneficial laws. He demanded a law which would bring about an alleviation of the decree complained of.

"Do you desire, messieurs," he asked in conclusion, "to ensure a prompt collection of taxes, do you desire to increase the value of paper money threefold, do you desire to kill speculation, do you desire to deal with the so-called religious disorders—in short, do you desire to foil all malevolent rumours and consolidate the Revolution? Pass such laws; pay heed to the people!"

But the Legislative hesitated.

In the spring of 1792 incidents occurred. Workers and peasants demanded the enforcement of a maximum price for grain.

The peasants of Seine-et-Marne, Seine-et-Oise, Eure, Eure-et-Loire, Loire-et-Cher, and Loiret demonstrated in the market places. At Melun thirty communes marched in arms to the market-hall. At Verneuil (Eure), the peasants themselves imposed a fixed price on wheat, bread, eggs, wood and iron, and demanded a lowering of rents. In the neighbourhood of Nimes and Ales they destroyed the escutcheons on the gates of the *chateaux*, they revolted against an attempt to collect irredeemable dues.

The Legislative became perturbed and considered the problem. They were forced to take Couthon's warning into consideration. Yet the Right of the Assembly strove to prevent any equitable solution of the peasant problem, which after the outbreak of the war became every day more menacing. The session of June 14th, 1792, saw significant incidents. A proposal to amend the law passed by the Constituent was under discussion. The deputies of the Right, in an attempt to force the Chairman to close the sitting, left

the Assembly. But there were enough deputies left to constitute a quorum, and the following decree was adopted:

"The Assembly decrees that all feudal rights which are not justified by primitive title-deeds shall be suppressed without indemnity."

This did nothing towards suppressing the redeemable dues, but it was all the same a first step, if an extremely limited one, towards rendering the position less onerous for the peasants.

August 10th, 1792! The people of Paris overthrew the Monarchy. Louis XVI was imprisoned. Encouraged by this victory, the peasants redoubled their activity. Their petitions poured into the Legislative. Under popular pressure, it decided, on August 16th, to suspend all prosecutions for non-payment of "former feudal" claims and undertook to consider reforms. On August 25th it decreed that ". . . all quit-rent and annual feudal dues as well as casual dues are abolished without indemnity unless it can be proved that they are conceded by title-deeds."

In this way, one by one fell the obstacles to the will of the peasants. There remained, however, a last restriction. It was the task of the Jacobins to do away with it. On July 17th, 1793, after the fall of the Girondins, the Convention declared without qualification the complete abolition without indemnity of all feudal rights. Thus the peasants in the end gained what they had aimed for.

The Sale of National Property and the Redistribution of Land

The Revolution coupled the problem of redistributing the land with that of selling the national estates, but it was not settled as simply as the question of feudal rights. A very great number of peasants found it impossible for them to acquire land.

From October, 1789, the Constituent, faced with the problem of finding money for the State Budget, considered the confiscation of Church estates.

The clergy, as has been seen, owned valuable estates, the total income of which was 100 million *livres* and the value of which was then estimated at approximately 3,000 to 4,000 million *francs*, which in 1939, in current value would repre-

sent approximately 45,000 to 60,000 million francs. The confiscation of these estates had been suggested in the *Cahiers de Doleances*. The Bishop of Autun, Talleyrand Perigord, on October 10th, 1789, urged upon the Assembly the main reasons in favour of the reform:

"What appears to me certain," he declared, "is that the clergy are not proprietors like other proprietors, as the property which they enjoy and of which they cannot dispose has been given, not for their personal use, but for the performance of a public service."

In effect, the Church had received gifts and legacies, not only for its own upkeep, but also to cover the development of charitable institutions. Talleyrand's argument was solid and won the day. On November 2nd, 1789, the Constituent Assembly decreed that "all ecclesiastical property belongs to the nation, along with the duty of providing in a satisfactory way for the upkeep of the Church, the maintenance of its ministers, and the relief of the poor."

This property thus nationalized served as a backing for the issues of *assignats* circulated to assist the State Treasury. The sale of this national property provided funds to reduce the public debt.

Here we are concerned only with the sales of national estates which brought about a profound change in the distribution of land.

The sale was decided upon by the Constituent on May 14th. 1790. It did not start till the beginning of 1791.

The conditions of sale, despite certain stipulations which appeared to favour those with slender means, gave the best chances to the rich and well-to-do. At first whole estates were put up for auction. It is true that the decree of the Assembly stipulated that when the bids for portions of the estate amounted in cash to the best bid for the whole estate, a division into lots must take place. And it also stipulated that purchasers needed only to deposit 12 per cent. of the price and would be given twelve years to complete their purchase. But it was extremely difficult for the small peasant to fight on an equal footing with the rich bidders, and in practice most of their estates went in single lots. It was not until much later, in the first period of the Jacobin Conven-

tion (June 3rd, 1793), that a division into small lots became compulsory.

Until then the rich bourgeoisie and the speculators had a free hand. Fortunes were made by re-selling in lots estates purchased in lump.

Small peasants were able to obtain land, but they had to buy it dearly. In some districts they organized to checkmate the manœuvres of the rich and the speculators. They did this in the North of France, Pas-de-Calais, Aisne, and Somme. These peasant associations bought estates which they afterwards divided among their members. They grouped twenty, thirty, forty or 100 members in each village. But these examples remain relatively very few for the country as a whole.

At the time these estates were put up for sale, the municipalities were given authority to purchase them. Many a municipality bought estates within its boundaries. Some bought lands in neighbouring communes. They administered these estates while waiting to re-sell them to individuals. Often the municipal officers and their friends took the chance to make safe and profitable investments. Later the administrators of the districts were called upon to preside over the sales by auction. The transactions did not always take place regularly. There were frauds and injustices. Attempts were made to head off prospective buyers by threats and bribes. Bribes were distributed to dishonest administrators. To put an end to this, the Convention had to intervene on August 24th, 1793.

In 1792 the estates of the *émigrés* were put up for sale. The Legislative had confiscated them on March 30th. On September 2nd it decided the conditions of sale. The poor peasants wanted a sale of small lots, but the Assembly left the local administrators to decide the size of these lots. The peasants did not receive satisfaction until the Jacobin Convention intervened.

In this way a whole network of bourgeois contact was spread over the countryside. The new proprietors, as can be seen from the deeds of the purchase, were in the main merchants, tradesmen, shopkeepers, manufacturers, and market-gardeners. In the District of Libourne (Gironde) there were, from 1790 to 1793, 287 purchasers, of whom forty-one were merchants and tradesmen, four public notaries,

twelve ecclesiastics, twenty lawyers, three ex-nobles, fourteen landowners, seven doctors, one architect, one contractor, one barrister, two professors, twelve husbandmen, four vine-dressers, five coopers, three millers, seven blacksmiths, etc. In Aisne, the bourgeois acquired 40 to 45 per cent. of the land; the remainder was divided between farmers and artisans. In the west, bourgeois and husbandmen prevailed. In Gard the farmers acquired at most one-sixth of the national property, and in Seine-et-Oise a little less than one-seventh.

It is plain that the urban and rural bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie acquired the greater part of the land sold, but it should not be concluded that the landless peasants were eclipsed completely. It is however true that in general they were unable to realize their age-old ambition to become independent with a cottage and a field of their own.

The Jacobins, disciples of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who thought that all social questions would be solved if there were no longer either rich or poor, proposed to realize this dream by distributing among the indigent land confiscated from those declared "suspect".

The idea of confiscating the property of enemies of the people had been mooted immediately after August 10th, 1792. The Girondin, Gensonne, defended the proposal in the Legislative, but it was not followed up. The Girondins were too representative of the big bourgeoisie and they had too many ties with monarchy to follow such a course.

It was Couthon who, in the name of the Jacobins at the time of the insurrection of Vendee and the betrayal of Dumouriez, took up the proposition. On May 8th, 1793, he requested the Convention to impose a compulsory loan on the "suspect" in proportion to their taxable wealth in order to raise the means of equipping the *sans-culottes* who were going to fight the *Chouans*.¹

Collot d'Herbois, two days later, made it clear that it was proposed to seize one-third of the fortunes of the "suspect" and to devote the funds realized to cover the expenditure incurred in the civil war of Vendee.

A movement in favour of this measure soon developed throughout the country under the impetus of the departmental committees of Public Safety. Certain of these Committees

1 The rebels of Vendee.

and representatives on mission took the initiative in local confiscations. In September, 1793, the Committee of Public Safety of Haute-Vienne sequestered the property of the "suspects" of the Department, administered it and made use of the income to pay the extraordinary taxes due from it. Fouche, on mission in Nievre on October 2nd, 1793, ordered the sequestration of the property of "suspects." Roux Fazillac in Dordogne sequestered the property of those who had fled and suggested to the Committee of Public Safety a law of general sequestration.

Worth quoting as showing the state of mind of the *sans-culottes* at this critical period, when the Revolution had to face dangers from without, and within, is the motion adopted by the Club of Sedan (September 16th, 1793),

"It would appear," the Jacobins declared, "that the Revolution has changed nothing beyond letting the men with money succeed those with parchments"

And, "convinced that the rich are no better than the nobility," the patriots of Sedan suggested that the Convention should decree the following measures:

1. "Where, as a result of the machinations of opulent citizens of any given town, a movement of revolt has been incited, the town shall be declared in revolt."
2. "This declaration shall serve as a pressing invitation to good citizens to combat the authors of the rebellion and save the public good."
3. "When the citizens shall have managed to crush the revolt, they will be declared to have deserved well of the *Patrie*; they will be recompensed with half the personal property belonging to the authors of the revolt; the other half shall be confiscated to the benefit of the Republic."
4. "The established authorities will be charged with the equal distribution of this property."
5. "The known leaders of the revolt shall be punishable by death and the others by deportation."

The voice of the Club of Sedan did not remain isolated. Hanriot, Commander of the National Guard, on October 28th, 1793, stated before the Jacobins of Paris that—

"it is necessary that everything the aristocrats lose be given to the patriots: houses, land must be shared amongst those who have vanquished the villains."

On December 3rd the Republican Society of Chalonssur-Marne requested the Convention to sequester the property of all suspects for the benefit of the Republic. At the same time the *sans-culottes* of Thiers also wanted "sequestration of the property of the property of suspects until peace, as an indemnity to the public treasury to defray war expenditure."

The law of September 17th, 1793, laid down that imprisoned suspects would be fed and guarded at their own expense. Measures yet more stringent were to be taken.

Couthon, at the beginning of 1794, raised the question of sequestration. And despite the intrigues of the "Indulgent" who were protecting the rich, the Convention on 8th Ventose of the Year II (February 26th, 1794), after a report from Saint-Just, voted a decree that "the property of persons known to be enemies of the Revolution will be sequestered for the benefit of the Republic. These persons will be retained until peace and then banished permanently."

This first decision was completed by a second decree, that of the 13th Ventose of the Year II (March 3rd, 1794), which provided for a census of indigent patriots who were to be compensated with confiscated property:

"Article I"

"All communes of the Republic shall draw up a register of all indigent patriots within their boundaries, with their names, age, occupation, number and age of their children. The directory of the districts shall forward these registers without delay to the Committee of Public Safety.

"Article II"

"When the Committee of Public Safety has received these registers, it shall report on the method of compensating all the needy with the property of the enemies of the Revolution according to the list of the Committee of

General Security sent to it and which shall be made public."

Robespierre, Saint-Just and the Jacobins proposed to put the enemies of the Republic to death. They also wished to do away with poverty by re-distributing confiscated lands. These views were expressed in a report made by Saint-Just on 23rd Ventose, of which the following is the most important:

"Since the decrees depriving the enemies of the Revolution of their property, the foreign foe has felt the blow struck against it and incited trouble to disturb and hinder the Government: we only know one way of stopping this evil—that is, to make the Revolution part of public life. If you give land to all the needy, if you take it away from all the flagitious, I swear that you will have carried out a revolution. . . Do you know what is the last support of monarchy? It is the class that does nothing, which cannot do without luxury, without folly; those who think of nothing, think of no good; who spread their spleen, the fury of their vicious pleasures and their disgust of communal life. Compel everyone to do something useful and to take up an occupation of use to liberty. What rights in the nation have those who do nothing? . . ."

If the decrees of Ventose were greeted with enthusiasm by the *sans-culottes*, who congratulated the Convention, they provoked the deepest fears among the owners, already greatly disturbed by the control of fortunes and the limitations on the rights of inheritance. The rich developed a demagogic campaign against Robespierre and his friends. Though the law of 8th Ventose of the Year II (February 26th, 1794) declared the property of patriots "sacred and inviolable," a rumour was spread that all property was to be challenged, seized, and shared out. Tallien, Fouche, Freron, Barras, and other unscrupulous intriguers, who feared the "Incorruptible," made common cause with the big bourgeoisie, and on 9th Thermidor (July 27, 1794) Robespierre, Saint-Just, and Couthon fell under the combined blows of the "corrupt" and the rich.

The great agrarian reform of the Jacobins could not be carried into force. Marx, in the *Holy Family*, brought admirably into relief reason of its failure:

"Robespierre, Saint-Just and their partisans succumbed because they confused the realist and antique democratic State based on real slavery with the representative idealist and modern democratic State based on emancipated slavery—bourgeois society.

"What a colossal error to recognize and sanction in the Rights of Man modern bourgeois society, the society of industry, of general competition, of private interests freely pursuing their ends, of anarchy, of natural and spiritual individuality at war with itself, and to want after this to annual in certain individuals the manifestations of this society and also try to make the form of this society conform to antiquity.

"This error appears tragic, when, on the day of his execution, Saint-Just, pointing to the big frame containing the Rights of Man hanging in the guardroom, proclaimed with justified pride: 'It was, however, I who achieved that! The frame proclaimed precisely the rights of man who could not be a man of the antique peoples any more than the economic and industrial conditions in which he lived were those of antiquity.'

The bourgeoisie, having grown conservative, carried out the coup of 9th Thermidor because it was in a hurry to terminate the Revolution. It was opposed to the restoration of the old régime, but it was determined to consolidate its class conquests. In these conditions its tactics were to find support among the landed peasants who, like they, were afraid of the workers and poor peasants.

Conclusion

It has only been possible to give a rough outline of the role of the peasants in the Great Revolution. They definitely succeeded in freeing themselves from the feudal yoke. The liberties which they obtained in common with the whole nation, and which they have had since to defend on numerous occasions against the attempts of reaction, have rooted deeply in them the love of democracy.

The mass of the rural poor did not manage to obtain land, but in a society which, while winning for the people undeniable progress, maintains the exploitation of man by

man, it was impossible for things to happen otherwise. Actually there are still nearly 4 million landless peasants, and the number of those who do possess land shows a distinct tendency to decrease day by day. This was clearly shown by Maurice Thorez in *l'Humanité* of June 20th, 1939. Between 1892 and 1929 more than one-third of the holdings and farms of less than 10 hectares have disappeared. The big bourgeoisie ruins and expropriates the small peasant without indemnity.

Yet in this period of decline of capitalist society the peasants, victims of the trusts, financiers, speculators, and big landowners, can look forward to their complete enfranchisement: Socialism, which will free them for ever, is to-day a reality in the Soviet Union, which is steadily advancing along the road to Communism.

The working class, by its numbers and its political maturity, has become the historically essentially progressive element in the nation. The interests of the great mass of the peasants are in accord with its own, and it is therefore the alliance of the workers and peasants which will lead our people to new victories of progress over the forces of social regression.

In 1789 the ancestors of our peasants contributed powerfully to the establishment of democracy by their alliance with the people of the towns.

To-day the peasants can best safeguard their sacred heritage from a century and a half ago by continuing more than ever to fight side by side with their brother—the workers in the factories, enterprises, and yards—for the maintenance of the liberties which Fascism seeks to destroy. That is the primary condition for an advance to the decisive conquest of full democracy.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND MODERN THOUGHT

By Georges Politzer¹
Fellow and Professor of History

THE "philosophy of enlightenment" was "that brilliant school of French materialists which made the eighteenth century, in spite of battles on land and sea won over Frenchmen by Germans and English, a pre-eminently French century, even before that crowning French Revolution, the results of which we outsiders, in England as well as in Germany, are still trying to acclimatize."

Thus in 1892 Engels, whose genius, with that of Marx, created historical materialism, spoke of the French materialism of the eighteenth century. Reaction has done all it could to obscure the ideas which dominated the "century of enlightenment." Its professors evolve vast theoretical profundities on the importance of ideas in history in general, but make nothing but confusion of this movement of ideas which made the eighteenth century "a pre-eminently French century." Our Party, on the contrary, in celebrating the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution, closely associated the men who accomplished it with "that brilliant school of French materialists" which prepared it.

"The French materialist philosophy of the eighteenth century became the creed of the French Revolution," wrote Engels. It represented a decisive stage in the development towards dialectical materialism, and, through Utopian Socialism, to scientific Socialism.

It is therefore necessary to know the historic role of the "philosophy of enlightenment." Its genesis and its evolution show indisputably on the scientific plane that it is we communists who are its true heirs and historic continuers.

¹ Shot as a hostage by the Nazis. Was leader of the underground movement among university professors and students, and one of the Editors of the illegal *l'Humanité*.

I

The Ideology of the Middle Ages

Lenin writes:

"Throughout the recent history of Europe, and particularly at the end of the eighteenth century in France, which was the scene of the decisive battle against every kind of medieval rubbish, against serfdom in institutions and ideas, materialism proved to be the only consistent philosophy, true to all the teachings of natural science, hostile to superstitions, cant," etc.¹

To understand the philosophy of enlightenment, it is necessary briefly to examine this *serfdom in ideas*, to examine roughly the system in which feudalism found its ideological expression.

The spokesmen of obscurantism, who propose a return to a more or less distant period of the Middle Ages, picture it as a "harmonious unity of souls." But the Middle Ages had also their struggles, their contradictory tendencies, which translated into the world of ideas transformations taking place in the economic and social fields. In discussing this feudal ideology, we can only outline roughly the system against which, as the Renaissance approached, a more and more intense struggle was being waged.

The essential element of this ideology was religion.

As Engels has shown, "the great international centre of feudalism was the Roman Catholic Church. It united the whole of feudalized Western Europe, in spite of all internal wars, into one grand political system, opposed as much to schismatic Greeks as to the Mohammedan countries. It surrounded feudal institutions with the halo of divine consecration."

The Catholic Church, in fact, explained society, as well as Nature, by God. Religious faith upheld feudalism, and feudalism nourished and upheld faith.

Contemporary obscurantists so into ecstasies about "the intense religious faith of the Middle Ages." They express in this way their regret for their paradise lost, and their desire at a pinch to transform the world into a hell so as to chase from the consciousness of men any enlightenment that has penetrated to them. The vulgar materialists and the re-

¹ Lenin: *Three Sources of Marxism* (Marx, *Selected Works* Vol. I p. 55).

presentatives of a certain "positivism," still more vulgar, content themselves with denouncing "human credulity" and to making witticisms about the Immaculate Conception.

Historical materialism shows the profane and material sources of religion and the practical consequences to be drawn. "The foundation of irreligious criticism," said Marx, "is this: *man makes religion*, religion does not make man." Man created God, man placed on determinate conditions of existence. Religion is a given manner in which the world is reflected in the consciousness of man. And if as a reflection it is an absurd reflection, it is because the world it reflects is itself absurd.

The world is society. Man in it is wretched; in it he is oppressed; it is a heartless world where man "does not possess any true reality," because society is not designed to make him happy; it is a world where man not truly realize his being, where there is, in fact; nothing for him but misery. It is, in effect, "a vale of tears."

In this position, man *needs illusions*. Religion furnishes them. It surrounds with a halo the vale of tears. It covers man's chains with "imaginary flowers," it consoles man by offering him the fantastic realization of his being.

"Religious misery," writes Marx, "is at once the expression of real misery and a protest against that real misery. Religion is the sigh of the hard-pressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, as it is the soul of soulless circumstances. It is the opium of the people."

Opium produces, as has been written, "artificial paradeses." Religion offers, free of charge, the dream of an imaginary paradise where everything will be for the best.

Marxism is at the same time the most consistent atheism and goes beyond the vulgar atheism which considers that "the criticism of Heaven" settles everything. Since religion is a fantastic reflection of the real world, it is necessary to demonstrate that religion is an illusion.

"The criticism of religions is the foundation of all criticism." This being the nature of religion, the struggle against it "is indirectly the struggle against the world of which religion is the spiritual aroma." But, according to Marxism, this indirect struggle against the world must become a direct struggle. If religion is an illusion with which man fortifies himself in a world where he needs illusions, it does not suffice

to denounce the illusion; it is necessary to suppress the need for illusions, and, to that end, transform the world. "The injunction to renounce illusions is the injunction to renounce a *state which needs illusions*." Criticism cannot therefore limit itself to criticisms of heaven; more is needed.

"Criticism," writes Marx, "has torn away the imaginary flowers which covered his chains, not so that man shall carry the chains devoid of all dreams and all consolation, but so that he will cast them aside and pick living flowers. Criticism of religion takes away from man his illusions so that he shall think, act, fashion his own reality like a man who has lost his illusions and attained the age of reason, so that he can move around on his own—that is to say, by his real sun."

In this way "the criticism of heaven is transformed into the criticism of earth. . . ." The struggle against the absurdity of religion becomes transformed into a struggle against the world which, by its absurdity, feeds religious beliefs. Therefore we can understand, at the same time, the nature of a certain noisy anti-clericalism. If some invite the workers with so much racket to lift their eyes to admire their exploits against the imaginary powers of Heaven, it is so that they shall not see their submission to the real powers on earth, not excluding the Church itself. "No surrender to Heaven, Munich on earth"—such is their slogan, while we Communists develop our criticism of Heaven by the criticism of earth and by action, working to unite in the struggle against the absurdity of the world those who believe and those who do not. The most excited opponents of the policy of the "open hand (to the Catholics)," on the contrary, flee to Heaven as soon as there is a battle to be fought on earth.

In the same way as the Medieval Church explained society and the State by God, so also in God it found its science. All its theories received "the halo of divine consecration." The fundamental teachings of religions, its dogmas, has been revealed by God, and the fact of this revelation was an insurmountable argument in support of their truth. God omniscient had revealed part of his knowledge; the truths he had communicated must therefore be eternal. In

the fields covered by the revelation there could be no question of learning more or understanding otherwise. There was only one problem: how to interpret rightly the truths revealed, which were to be found in the Holy Scriptures. The foundations of science were included therein for all eternity. To find the truth one must not study the facts, but study the texts.

Just as "the Church had organized its own hierarchy on the feudal model," so also it organized on the feudal model the world of thought and of scientific activity. To feudal society established by God for ever corresponded a science eternally true likewise founded by God.

The Middle Ages had inherited the Greek sciences. They knew them partly. Thanks mainly to Arab influence, they knew—badly, it is true--the works of Aristotle, the greatest scholar and philosopher of antiquity. St. Thomas Aquinas adapted these works to the need of the Church and the Medieval world. Aristotle became accordingly a scientific equivalent of the Book of Revelation. Still, in essence, to the truth one must study the texts. Interpret the ancient texts—such in all fields was the method of Medieval science. But, as in the whole of society there was a hierarchy in science. The insurmountable barriers which separated men in society corresponded to insurmountable barriers which separated men from the assessment of the value of their knowledge. These barriers received in each case "the halo of divine consecration." God had bestowed upon the lords of the earth arable lands. In the same way, in science there were those who, thanks to "extraordinary assistance from Heaven," possessed the truth. These were the "authorities," the Church, St. Thomas, Aristotle, etc. If a question arose of the true meaning of a text several centuries old, it was improper to appeal from the text to proved facts: one must consult the authorized commentators. This was the *Authoritative method*, which in practice succeeded in preventing the development of science.

The course of physics in the colleges up to the seventeenth century was based on the work on physics by Aristotle. According to the instructions applied by the Jesuits, the professors were not allowed to comment themselves. Their instructions laid down that comment must be

confined to using the greatest authority on the question—that is to say, St. Thomas. But St. Thomas also had his authorized commentators. Therefore the study of physics were essentially a cascade of commentators and commentaries. It was this that gave to Medieval science its essentially bookish character, which Aristotelian science never had at its origin. The opportunists copy the “method of authority” when they cling to certain old Marxist theses, simply to stop the development of Marxist science and of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat.

The science inherited from the Greeks represented in the Medieval world the profane element, the “natural enlightenment” as opposed to the supernatural enlightenment given by revelation. The two never ceased to conflict, but this conflict was in the first place regulated by the subordination of the natural enlightenment to the supernatural enlightenment, of profane philosophy to theology, which was the science of God and of things sacred. *Philosophia est ancilla theologiae*—philosophy is the servant of theology—such was the motto. The justification given was the following: human reason has never been capable of discovering the truths that God has revealed. But as God is truth itself, as he is perfect, human reason can at the most rediscover certain of these truths; if it found something else it was going astray. The task of reason was precisely to prove that this was the position and to accumulate evidence in favour of theology. The theory that the sun rotated round the earth which was immobile; that according to which there were four elements, two of which, air and fire, moved upwards because they had in them a nature which made them rise, while the other two water and earth, fell because they had in them a nature which made them descend; the account of Creation in the Old Testament, etc.; these were considered as eternally true and as unchangedable as the Eucharist.

“Now up to them (the Renaissance period) science had been but the humble handmaid of the Church, had not been allowed to overstep the limits set by faith, and for that reason had been no science at all” (Engels).

Official science, drawing its knowledge from the same source, multiplied its efforts to keep in line with faith, exhausting itself in interminable reasonings which without

a new content, polished and refined the form. The official philosophy taught in the schools, the *scholastic*, degenerated into sterile formalism, which Moliere satirised.

Yet this learned ideology did not lack rivals. Alongside it developed, until the eighteenth century, the *secret sciences*—alchemy, occultism, magic, and sorcery—and there existed through the whole of society the most barbarous superstitions, ignorances, and obscurantisms which are, as the Encyclopædist later stated, the best allies of slavery. It is this obscurantism, not the scholastic refinements, which reaction speaks of nostalgically when it speaks of the Middle Ages, and it is a still more barbaric obscurantism that Fascism wants to instil into man by force. One of the reasons of its hostility to Christianity is that Christian morals were a progressive factor compared to the barbarity which characterized the opening of the Middle Ages. At the same time, Nazi racialism reproaches St. Thomas Aquinas with having given too high a place to reason.

If the Middle Ages were not simply a long night, it was because during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries there developed the real germs of a scientific rebirth. Eventually there arose “.... the great renaissance of science; astronomy, mechanics, physics, anatomy, physiology were developed anew” and “science rebelled against the Church.” Medieval ideology was beaten back. It was a long process during which, little by little, new ideas were forged and in which philosophical materialism was reborn.

II

Elaboration of French Materialism of the Eighteenth Century

French materialism of the eighteenth century was the fusion of two currents. One came from England and started with Francis Bacon. The other started with Descartes. Marx and Engels have always insisted on the duality of the sources of our philosophy of the eighteenth century. This knowledge is important for us. On the one hand, reaction attempts to juggle with the materialism of the Encyclopædist, the materialism of Descartes, and on the other the “breakers of Heaven,” of whom mention has already been made, sing

in unison with the spokesmen of the Church to transform Descartes into a vulgar scholastic. "He is," writes M. Bayet, "everything expected of a man of order. Conservative from a religious point of view, conservative from a political point of view, he was in many ways less bold than many Medieval thinkers and many Jesuits." This is a thesis directly copied from the "works" of the friends of the Jesuits themselves.

Bacon proclaimed against the bookish science of the Middle Ages: "It is necessary to study science from the great book of Nature."

Marx has summarized the doctrine of Bacon in the following way:

"All science is founded on experience and consists of submitting the facts supplied by reason to a rational method of investigation. Induction, comparison, observation, experiment are the principal forms of a rational method of this kind."

With Bacon, "among the inherent qualities of matter, motion is the first and most important . . ." And Marx showed that already Bacon had of motion a richer conception, in which he not only saw a change of place, a mechanical motion, but "an impulse, a vital spirit, a tension." Arising therefrom, "materialism contains the germ of a multi-form development." From Bacon materialism developed through Hobbes to Locke. "Hobbes had systematized Bacon without, however, furnishing a proof for Bacon's fundamental principle of the origin of all human knowledge from the world of sensation. It was Locke who, in his *Essay on Human Understanding*, supplied this proof." Locke undertook to prove that all human ideas came from experience. With him we are already in the eighteenth century. His work is a direct source of the philosophy of enlightenment.

The idea that all knowledge came from the sensible world, through the senses, was of great importance. Firstly, it broke with mystic conceptions concerning the origin of knowledge. But at the same time one of the arguments invoked in favour of the existence of God consisted in the claim that man had within him an innate idea of God. Descartes stated that the of infinite being was like the seal of the Creator in the consciousness of the creature. The theory of innate ideas served equally to support feudal insti-

tutions. The innate sentiment of inequality in men proved that it was by God that this inequality was instituted.

To prove that all ideas come from experience was to refute the theory of innate ideas and to strike a decisive blow against theology and metaphysics. This is one of the essential reasons of the importance of Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*. It was Condillac who transferred it to France. Condillac developed the doctrine of Locke in a more consistent manner and exercised considerable influence. It is interesting to note that the bourgeoisie again took up the theory of innate ideas to support capitalist property. All men have in them, declared its spokesmen, the innate idea of property, and instinct of property. It results from this that capitalist property is natural, it must not be infringed.

This evolution, which went from Bacon to Locke in England, produced Descartes in France and starting from him a school of savants and materialist philosophers.

Descartes rejected *en bloc* the whole theoretic edifice of Medieval science. He rejected its ideas and its methods. *The Discours de la Methode* assaulted with critical genius the whole edifice. He, in fact, proclaimed the freedom of scientific research against the method of authority and justified this negation on principle, the enunciation of which constitutes the opening of the *Discours*: "Good sense is the most equally distributed thing in the world." In the field of science, truth is proclaimed in principle accessible to all; discovery is dependent, not on the "assistance from Heaven," but on a method to which every one has access. Descartes wanted to disseminate its rules. He did not claim to have discovered them by supernatural means. He declared that he discovered them by analysing the methods by which discoveries were actually made. He evolved an effective method of scientific investigation. In the *Discours de la Methode*, scientific enquiry was definitely stripped of the "halo of divine consecration."

Descartes then elaborated his explanation of the world, his physics, from which modern physics has developed. He still attributed the creation of the world to God whose existence he postulated. It is this part of his philosophy which is called *metaphysics*. But God plays no role in his physics,

which is materialist, "where matter is the only substance, the sole reason of being and of knowledge" (Marx).

With Descartes science was already on the eve of completely breaking with theology and about to come out openly against it.

III

Feudalism before the "Tribunal of Reason"

As a result of these two evolutions, the physics of Descartes and then of Newton and English materialism, the elements were ready for the great decisive and definite struggle to be fought by the philosophy of enlightenment against all that was left of Medieval ideology. This struggle passed from the fight against the theoretic principles proclaimed by feudal society to the fight against all its institutions. It was the struggle against theology, against metaphysics, against the whole of religious beliefs, against, the social and political lightenment had destroyed the "halo of divine consecration" theories for which these principles had served as justification. By refuting theology and metaphysics, the philosophy of enlightenment with which the Church had surrounded the feudal institutions. They appeared in their profane nudity as products of ignorance and barbarism. The Encyclopædistes ceaselessly denounced their inhuman character, carrying on resounding campaigns against their fanaticism, intolerance, injustice, barbarity, etc. They transposed the proclamation of the equality of man from the field of science to the political and even, at times the social field. But they were not content with criticizing and refuting, to the old conception of the world they opposed a conception based on science: the materialist conception. In La Mettrie, Hevelius, and d'Holbach particularly is seen the fusion of the two currents from which came French materialism.

"The French," said Marx, "handled English materialism with spirit, giving it flesh and blood and eloquence. They gave it the temperament it still lacked, and grace; they civilized it."

In innumerable pamphlets, novels, essays, our philosophers not only refuted theology and metaphysics, but proposed scientific explanations in the place of religious beliefs. They mobilized in the service of the ideological struggle all the resources of literary genius, the seduction of eloquence the magnificent weapon of satire, written with pitiless irony, yet with every finesse of wit. They were ardent fighters who themselves attacked and left no opponent without reply. Brilliant advocates, they pulverized the enemy by proving his ignorance and at the same time made him odious and ridiculous.

This feature of the development of the philosophy of enlightenment can be followed since the Renaissance through Mortaigne and Rabelais up to Descartes and Pascal.

In 1637, the *Discours de la Methode* was a masterpiece which presented scientific conceptions with unprecedented sharpness and an audacity which even Voltaire erroneously interpreted, and which showed that contemporary science was by no means "unreasonable," with irony to which no retort was possible, and with malice which consisted in refuting the scholastics on their own ground by turning against them in form their own arguments with a new content. Speaking of the scholastics, Dascartes wrote:

"However, their method of philosophizing is very convenient for those who have but mediocre minds, for the obscurity of distinction and principle which they use is the reason why they can speak so boldly on all things as if they understood them, and stand out against the most subtle and most expert without the possibility of being convinced. In this they appear to me similar to a blind man who, so as to fight without disadvantage against one who sees, had got him to come into the end of some extremely dark cave."

There are still scholastics of this kind.

In 1656 and 1657 Blaise Pascal wrote *The Letters written to a Provincial by a Friend*. It is a masterpiece, one of the world's greatest literary polemics—an assault of genius against the Jesuits, their hypocrisy, their opportunism, and their casuistry which invented theories to justify all kinds of corruption.

In the seventh letter on *The Method of Directing the Intention*, Pascal places the following words in the mouth of a Jesuit:

“ . . . When we cannot prevent the action, we at least purify the motive; and in this way we correct the viciousness of the *means* by the goodness of the *end*.”

Is it not in this way that some correct the viciousness of a certain vote by “purifying the the motive,” which was, it is said, not to endorse the *principle*, but to decide *procedure*? And do not such quibbles also recall the doctrine of *mental reservation*, of which Pascal writes in his ninth letter that to speak truth in a whisper is to lie in a loud voice.

In 1697 the *Dictionary of History and Criticism* by Pierre Bayle discredited intolerance, fanaticism, and metaphysics. Bayle constituted definitely a transition to the philosophy of enlightenment.

Typical of the philosophers of the eighteenth century is the method of *Candide*. In it Voltaire made mockery of the philosophy which sought to prove that this world—actually seventeenth—and eighteenth-century society—was the best possible of worlds, and that consequently “everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.” Evil, event at its greatest, is always therefore the *lesser evil*. In the same way in *Jacques the Fatalist*, Diderot, who combined scientific and literary genius, gave a witty satire of fatalism. Jacques said that happen what may “it was written up above.” It will be understood why certain literary critics and ex-literary critics like our philosophers of the eighteenth century so little.

The criticism of religious theories was in the first place carried out in the name of reason.

“If Luther and Calvin came back into this world,” wrote Voltaire, “they would make no more noise than the Scotists and the Thomists. Why? Because they would be coming at a time when men are beginning to be coming at a time when men are beginning to be enlightened.

“Only in barbarous times does one find sorcerers, possessed people, excommunicated kings, subjects freed from their oath of allegiance by doctors of theology.”

The Church was criticized at the same time from a moral view-point. Helvetius wrote:

"The interest of the clergy, like that of all bodies, changes with place, time, and circumstance. Any morality with fixed principles will never be adopted by the priesthood. They want one whose obscure, contradictory, and consequently variable, precepts lend themselves to all the diverse positions in which they may find themselves.

"The priest needs an arbitrary morality which justifies to-day actions which to-morrow he will declare abominable.

"Unfortunate are the nations which entrust priests with the education of their citizens."

Nevertheless, the rich bourgeoisie was latter to entrust the education of its children to the Church, proclaiming the necessity of moral education.

The philosophers of the eighteenth century defended freedom of thought against religious intolerance and persecution.

"If persecution is contrary to evangelic kindness and to the laws of humanity," wrote Diderot, "it is no less opposed to reason and to healthy politics."

"Freedom of thought in religious questions," said Holbach, "can only be ravished from men by injustice as absurd as it is useless."

But, speaking o the priesthood, he said:

"It can be defined as a league formed by a few impostors against freedom, happiness, and the peace of the human race."

A noteworthy feature of the critique developed by these philosophers was their defence of the interest of both the individual and of society—the national interest against the Church and the clerics.

"If the interests of a priest could be the same as the national interest," wrote Helvetius, "religion would be a confirmation of every wise and human law.

"This supposition is inadmissible. The interests of the ecclesiastics are everywhere isolated and distinct from the public interest.

"Priestly government has, from the time of the Jews to that of the Pope, always vilified the nation in which it was established."

It was at the same time in the name of morals and the interests of the nation that Diderot condemned the Massacre of St. Bartholomew:

"By this ghastly event," he wrote, "France was deprived of a host of useful citizens."

And the author of the *Nun* analysed the position of priests in the following way:

"It is an interminable war, that of the people who want to be free, and of the king who wants to command. The priest is, in accordance with his interests, either with the king against the people or with the people against the king. When he is content with praying to the gods, it is because he has little concern in the matter."

In their criticism of theology, of metaphysics, of the Church, of its policy and morals, the philosophers of the eighteen century represent a brilliant example of the march of humanity towards what Marx called the "Age of Reason." To attain this, and through it the general happiness of man, was the conscious aim of the philosophers of the eighteenth century.

Helvetius wrote:

"If justice and truth are sisters, there are no really useful laws but those based on a deep understanding of the nature and the real interests of man. Any law that has at its root lies or spurious revelations is always harmful. It is not on such a foundation that enlightened man will build the principles of equity."

Rousseau, who showed in his *Social Contract* that the king's right was not "divine," but human, wrote on the subject of inequality that it is—

"manifestly against the laws of Nature in whatever manner it is defined that a child should command his elder, that an imbecile should lead a wise man, and that a handful should gorge superfluities while the multitudes starve from lack of necessities."

The eighteenth-century philosophers fought for a rational society and a rational state: therein lay alike their greatness and their limitations.

"True freedom," wrote Holbach, "consists in conforming to laws which remedy the natural inequalities of men—that is to say, equally protect the rich and the poor, the great and the small, the sovereign and his subject. From which it is seen that freedom is equally advantageous to all members of society."

Reason in this field was, as Engels said, "idealized bourgeois intelligence."

"The French Revolution had realized this rational society and government," he wrote, "but the new order of things, rational enough as compared with earlier conditions, turned out to be by no means absolutely rational."

As the reactionary bourgeoisie blurs over the materialism of the philosophers of enlightenment, it is indispensable to show precisely in what consisted the materialism of their conceptions.

They are *materialists* in that they interpret the universe in terms of matter in motion and by nothing else.

They are *materialists* in their *theory of knowledge*, in regarding all knowledge as derived from the real world, through experience.

They are *materialists* in proclaiming the essential unity of all science.

Furthermore, this materialism is essentially humanist: for the materialists the goal to aim at was the happiness of man and society.

Through its different representatives, this materialism developed these different aspects and, as a whole, with a vigour which varied with the limits imposed by historic conditions and the degree of knowledge available. It was Diderot who carried this materialism furthest.

Engels gives some interesting details of the way in which eighteenth-century materialism was bound up with the social and political movement.

The class most directly concerned to struggle against the pretensions of the Papal Church was, Engels explained, the bourgeoisie. It fell foul of the established Church at several points. In the first place, because it was hostile to feudalism. Therefore, "before profane feudalism could be successfully attacked in each country and detail, this sacred central organisation had to be destroyed." From this arose the great

revival of scientific enquiry which developed in step with the progress of the bourgeoisie:

"Science rebelled against the Church; the bourgeoisie could not do without science, and therefore had to join the rebellion

"But if the universities and the traders of the cities started this cry, it was sure to find, and did find, a strong echo in the masses of the country people, the peasants, who everywhere had to struggle for their very existence against their feudal lords, spiritual and temporal."

As Engels says, three great battles mark decisive stages in the prolonged struggle against feudalism: *the Protestant Reformation in Germany; the Revolutions (1640 and 1688) in England; and the French Revolution.*

But in the first two of these battles the issues were still obscured by a religious cloak.

"The great French Revolution was the third uprising of the bourgeoisie, but the first that had entirely cast off the religious cloak, and was fought out on undisguised political lines; it was the first, too, that was really fought out up to the destruction of one of the combatants, the aristocracy, and the complete triumph of the other, the bourgeoisie."

In England materialism was originally an aristocratic doctrine, whose growth "contributed to strengthen the religious leanings of the bourgeoisie," since the new doctrine shocked "the pious feelings of the middle class: it announced itself as a philosophy fit only for scholars and cultivated men of the world, in contrast to religion which was good enough for the uneducated masses, including the bourgeoisie." With Hobbes and his successors, materialism remained "an aristocratic, esoteric doctrine therefore, hateful to the middle class, both for its religious heresy and for its anti-bourgeois political connections."

Carried from England to France, materialism remained at first "an exclusively aristocratic doctrine. But soon its revolutionary character asserted itself." In effect, the French materialists passed on from criticizing religion to challenge orthodox tradition in science and in political institutions. They accomplished the work of giants in the *Encyclopædia*, after which materialism became "the creed of

the whole cultured youth of France; so much so that, when the great Revolution broke out, the doctrine hatched by English Royalists gave a theoretical flag to French Republicans and Terrorists, and furnished the text for the declaration of the Rights of Man." Thanks to the Revolution, materialism then became an integral part of French culture.

IV

Eighteenth-century Materialism and Modern Materialism

Eighteenth-century materialism depended on the prevailing condition of the sciences, which still showed profound weaknesses. Chemistry had barely developed. Sciences relevant to the evolution of Nature hardly existed. The origin of species was rarely discussed.

In consequence, the eighteenth-century materialists did not consider Nature in its development, but as a great machine in eternal rotation, which for this reason had no history. This is why Engels called this materialism *metaphysical*. One aspect of this standpoint was its *mechanism*, which consisted of considering Nature as a *machine* obeying only mechanical laws. The philosophers of the eighteenth-century explained Nature by mechanics, because at this period mechanics was the most developed science.

Mechanical conceptions were applied also to the history of society. The eighteenth-century materialists saw no process of development in society. For them the Middle Ages were only one long night, an interruption pure and simple of civilization. They thought that "all the past merits is pity and contempt." Furthermore, their conception of history was not materialist, since, in general, they considered that men acted as a result of ideas. Whence these ideas arose and why, they made no attempt to determine. They were blind to the real motive forces of history.

These are the theoretic insufficiencies of the materialism of the eighteenth century: *its narrowness*.

This narrowness shows itself also in the way the philosophers and their disciples, the men of the Revolution, interpreted historical events.

The eighteenth-century philosophers did not criticize the institutions of feudalism from the point of view of the

ascendant bourgeoisie intentionally. Their criticism was, as has been shown, in the name of reason. Far from desiring to be the champions of one social class only, they aimed at freeing the whole of humanity. They envisaged a society based on reason and a State based on reason likewise. Nevertheless, the society that was the outcome of the French Revolution had to be bourgeois society. It was an enormous historical advance for humanity, but in emancipating itself the bourgeoisie was not destined to liberate the whole of humanity. Bourgeoisie society was to be the last form of antagonist society—one which did not end the exploitation of man by man—but it made possible the growth of the material conditions in which, and the human forces whereby, this historic end can be accomplished: the overthrow of capitalism. That is why Engels was able to say that the reign of reason of which the philosophers of the eighteenth century spoke was, as history was to show, "the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisies. That shows that "the great thinkers of the eighteenth century could no more than their predecessors go beyond the limits imposed upon them by their epoch."

During the nineteenth century, science has surmounted the narrowness which showed itself in the eighteenth century. Chemistry and biology developed, geology and Darwinism have taught scholars to consider Nature in its development and not as a rotating machine. Everything henceforth appears as having a history: the solar system, the earth, plants, animals, men—so many developments which, far from being isolated, are all interlinked in one immense historic process.

From the first half of the nineteenth century, the materialism of the Encyclopædistes stood no longer on a level with the sciences.

A new task had been posed by the development of science itself: that of continuing the development of materialist theory. The eighteenth-century materialists themselves had left a task unaccomplished: that of applying in a consistent manner materialism to history, to the study of the development of society.

This twofold task was undertaken by Marx and Engels. They performed the first task in *dialectical materialism*, the second in *historical materialism*. How Marx and Engels accomplished these two tasks, how they extracted the "inner kernel" from the dialectic of Hegel, and what are the fun-

damental features of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, all may learn from the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)*.

Marx and Engels continued the development begun by the eighteenth-century materialists. For this reason Lenin insisted that dialectical materialism is *modern* materialism. But Marx and Engels developed the philosophy of enlightenment precisely as *dialecticians*—that is to say, by going beyond it. By the dialectic Marxist method, they went beyond that narrowness of eighteenth-century materialism which the state of science at that period made inevitable. Thenceforward for the first time the materialist standpoint was applied universally in an entirely consistent manner.

It is because Marxism alone accomplished these tasks that it is the sole legitimate heir and continuation of the philosophy of enlightenment. And it alone can be this, since materialism can only keep abreast of modern science by being dialectical, and there can be no scientific conception of history other than historical materialism. This "extends principles of dialectical materialism to the study of the phenomena of social life, to the study of the development of society."

But, thanks to this extension, the science of the history of society becomes, "despite all the complexity of the phenomenon of social life . . . a science as exact as biology and capable of applying the laws of social development in practice."

This practical application is scientific Socialism: ". . . Socialism, the dream of a better future for humanity, became a science."

Marx and Engels often laid stress on this evolution of eighteenth-century materialism into Socialism and Communism.

In *Anti-Dühring*, Engels showed that "in every great bourgeois movement there were independent outbursts of that class which was the more or less developed forerunner of the modern proletariat." These theoretical manifestations corresponded to the movements of an incompletely formed class." In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Utopian portrayals of ideals social conditions, in the eighteenth century, actual communistic theories (Morelly and Mably). The demand for equality was no longer limited to political rights,

but was extended also to the social conditions of individuals: it was not merely class privileges that were to be abolished, but class distinctions themselves."

If Marx said that the French "civilized" materialism, it was above all because with the materialists of the eighteenth-century materialism placed man at the centre of its pre-occupations.

"In Helvetius, who likewise started out from Locke, materialism receives its real French character. He comprehended it at once in its relation to social life (*Helvetius. On Man*). Sensuous qualities and egoism, pleasure and enlightened self-interest are the foundation of all morality. The natural equality of human intelligences, the unity between the progress of reason and the progress of industry, the natural goodness of man, the omnipotence of upbringing are the principal features of his system."

And Marx writes further:

"No great acumen is required to perceive the necessary interconnection of materialism with Communism and Socialism, from the doctrines of materialism concerning the original goodness and equal intellectual endowment of man; concerning the omnipotence of experience, habit and upbringing; concerning the influence of external circumstances of man, the great importance of industry, the justification of enjoyment, etc."

This is expressed in the continuity of doctrine: in Babeuf and Fourier (who started directly from French materialism), in Helvetius' disciple, Bentham, from whom derived Owen, "the founder of English Communism." Cabet came into contact with Owen's Communism during his exile and brought it back to France and popularized it.

Although "comprehending materialism in its relation to social life" was a "specific feature" of French materialism, this materialism knew nothing of any law of development in society. The same is true of the great representatives of Utopian Socialism: Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen.

Engels stressed this analogy between the Utopians and the philosophers, and found a reason in that none of them were willing to be representatives of a class. The philosophers did not claim to represent the bourgeoisie. The

Utopians did not claim to represent the proletariat. All of them aimed at liberating humanity as a whole.

The Utopians, like the philosophers, developed their criticisms and advanced their suggestions for reform in the name of pure reason and eternal justice. But, as Engels points out, there was a world of difference between the reason and eternal justice of the eighteenth-century philosophers and that of the nineteenth-century Utopians. The bourgeois world had in the meantime developed its contradictions and revealed its imperfections. "Compared with the splendid promises of the philosophers, the social and political institutions born of the 'triumph of reason' were bitterly disappointing caricatures."

The Utopians therefore denounced this world. Fourier, in particular, carried out a critical assault of genius. The

Thenceforward reason will cease to be the halo of a society which cannot conform to it. Men will construct society on a rational plan, and humanity will pass from "the reign of necessity into that of freedom."

The *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* Utopians thought that the "bourgeois world based upon the principles of the philosophers" was just as irrational and unjust as feudalism and all earlier stages of society had been: "If pure reason and justice have not hitherto ruled the world, this has been due only to the fact that until now men have not rightly understood them. What was lacking was just the individual man of genius, who has now arisen and has recognized the truth; the fact that he has now arisen, that the truth has been recognized precisely at this moment, is not an inevitable event, following of necessity in the chain of historical development, but a mere happy accident. He might just as well have been born five hundred years earlier, and would then have saved humanity five hundred years of error, strife and suffering."

Engels showed that Utopian Socialism was the necessary consequence of the immature development of production and of the class struggle. Fuller development of these phenomena made possible later the creation of scientific Socialism.

Through scientific Socialism, Marxism gave to man not only an understanding of science, but also of his own destiny.

The social problems raised by the reign of reason found in their turn a rational solution. Marx and Engels showed what had prevented reason from reigning over society: the exploitation of man by man. They showed that the prerequisite for the true reign of reason was the suppression of that of the proletariat; that the means to this end will be the revolutionary conquest of power. capitalism; that the social force which will accomplish this (*Bolshevik*) show how Marxism enriched by Lenin and Stalin has made possible the effective realization of Socialism for one-sixth of the earth.

The universal humanitarian ideal posed with so much eloquence by the eighteenth-century philosophers is thus oriented to the appropriate conditions for its rational realization. The philosophers advocated the emancipation of humanity in general and not of any social class in particular. They wanted humanity to reign; but all they got was the reign of the bourgeoisie. Marx and Engels discovered that the emancipation of humanity as a whole has for its primary prerequisite the emancipation of the proletariat. After the proletarian revolution and the construction of Socialism, a truly human society ceases to be an abstract ideal and becomes an actual achievement—classless society.

V

Materialism and the Bourgeoisie

From the moment when the revolutionary proletariat begins seriously to threaten the revolutionary proletariat begins seriously to threaten the bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie begins to recall the services the Church and religious faith have rendered to the cause of social conservatism. From then onward the bourgeoisie abandons the philosophy of its revolutionary ancestors.

“Nothing remained to the French and German bourgeoisie as a last resource but silently to drop their free-thought, as a youngster, when seasickness creeps upon him, quietly drops the burning cigar he brought swaggeringly on board; one by one, the scoffers turned pious in outward behaviour, spoke with respect of the Church, its dogmas and rites, and even conformed with the latter

as far as could not be helped. French bourgeois dined *maigre* on Fridays, and German ones sat out long Protestant sermons in their pews on Sundays. They had come to grief with materialism. "*Die Religion muss dem Volk erhalten werden*"—religion must be kept alive for the people—that was the only and last means to save society from utter ruin."

In effect, in France, particularly after the Commune, the reactionary bourgeoisie organized systematically the "forgetting" of materialism. Modern materialism, Marxism? Until recent years, manuals and philosophic dictionaries did not even mention the existence of "dialectical materialism."

It was vulgar materialism, even positivism, that were presented as the only forms of materialism and "triumphantly" refuted by the reactionary philosophers with whom the universities were filled. At the same time, a contempt for science was spread among the cultured youth along with more or less mystical notions designed to save them from that "abandon of the elite" in which the historians of reaction teach the bourgeoisie to see the prime cause of the success of the Revolution. It was not feasible to eliminate all the Encyclopaedists from school programmes out of hand. But they did to them what Diderot described in *Less Bijoux Indiscrets*: pygmies armed with scissors and razors carved the heads of the giants so as to reshape them to their own liking.

"I heard one asking for the return of his nose, explaining that it was not possible for him to be seen without it.

"Oh! head, my sweet," replied the pygmy, 'you are mad. That nose which you so regret disfigured you. It was long, long. . .!'

The Encyclopaedists' "nose" which was so long that steps had to be taken to cut it off was their *materialism*. Editions of "selections" were prepared confined to more or less soothing passages, and books were written on eighteenth-century philosophers in which the fact that they were materialists was glossed over.

This is characteristic; and this is also found among the protagonists of that noisy atheism of which we have already spoken. In a recent book, Professor Bayet, in speaking of the eighteenth century, forgot nothing—but its materialism!

But to the degree that in its period of imperialism all its

contradictions increase, capitalism tends more and more to the slogan: there must be a *mysticism for the people*. And Nazi Fascism was to show that it needed still more mysticism and still less reason than the old religions provided.

What is above all dangerous for the capitalist oligarchies is the knowledge the workers may acquire of the laws of history. Therefore Fascism undertakes to exterminate those who have this knowledge—that is to say, the Marxists—and to inculcate into the consciousness of man *racialism*. There are no classes, but only races. There is no class struggle, but only race struggles. The mystification is crude. It is clear that the “race” is intended to hide the classes.

Naturally, elementary scientific knowledge teaches that “race” and race struggles are inventions. But the official theoretician of racialism, Rosenberg, because of this, forbids enquiry into what lies behind races; races and their struggles represent, he asserts, the ultimate limits of knowledge: “It is not possible,” he says, “to go back further than that.” In practice, the racial state” prevents by steel and by fire any enquiry into what lies beyond races, and they organize obscurantism systematically. Along with democratic liberties, science must disappear, to be replaced by mysticism. Capitalism, now, rebels against science.

This mysticism must, by fostering ignorance, maintain man in a state of credulity, rendering him completely obedient, and ready for war. For this reason, the mysticism itself must be a mysticism of hatred and excitation; it must not have a spiritual aroma; it must only know the smell of blood. Education must be replaced by the exaltation of a new human race. To the racialists, the ideal man is the robot; the *Aryan* is only a cloak to make him presentable. The racial soul, the *Rassenseele*, that the Nazis want to inculcate into men is the slave soul, one designed to convert man as completely as possible into a robot. After so much *ersatz*, big German capital attempts to manufacture the *erstz* human soul.

They want to impose darkness over that mental region in which, influenced by French enlightenment and in contact therewith, developed German enlightenment, that *Aufklarung* which recalls all the greatest names of classic

philosophy and of literature in Germany, from Kant and Goethe up to Hegel. Goethe always wanted *more light*: they were his last words. The Nazis want always *less light* and *more darkness*. It is for this reason that they pass over in silence or misrepresent crudely that thinkers of the *Aufklarung*.

The revolutionary bourgeoisie was materialist. With science, which then it needed, it rebelled against the Church. Now it is the proletariat which needs science and makes common cause with it. From the nineteenth century, the people need religion. In the period of rotting capitalism, it takes refuge in the most barbarous forms of mysticism, in the mysticism of blood and of race, attempting to re-create darkness in men's souls so as to save itself.

Rosenberg knows what he is doing when he forbids any search for what is behind the *race*: behind "the big blond Aryan with blue eyes" there is the cosmopolitan riffraff of the capitalist oligarchy. This is why in Germany the big blond Aryan with blue eyes can be preached even by Hitler, who neither has blue eyes, nor is blond or big, or even Aryan, for the simple reason that such a thing does not exist. But Mussolini also preaches about the big Nordic Aryan; and Japanese capitalism also preaches racialism.

But whatever may be the efforts of capitalism to save itself by extirpating the enlightenment of two thousand years of civilization from human consciousness, it will not succeed. Moreover, one-sixth of the world's surface escapes it, and the Soviet Union, while being the bulwark of peace, is at the same time the bulwark of civilization. The land of Socialism is also the land of reason, the home of enlightenment.

Fascism cannot abolish the law that *being determines consciousness*. It can try to plant in the minds of men of the twentieth century fables corresponding to the life conditions of the tenth century. The life conditions will remain those of the twentieth century. It is all very well for them to try to inculcate into the industrial proletariat the mentality of the ancient Germans: their life conditions—those of capitalist exploitation—will so long as they exist re-create their consciousness as revolutionary proletarians. It is precisely from this that there arises the unheard-of violence of

Fascism in its effort to attain the unattainable. But this violence, itself a sign of weakness, rallies the toiling masses against it, and this all the more in consequence of the ripening of those contradictions of capitalism, which Fascism cannot solve, but only aggravate.

In the service of big capital, Hitler and his like have created hell on earth. The martyred masses will never again raise to Heaven their protestations against misery and war.

While the bourgeoisie, become conservative, has abandoned materialism, the large mass of the French people has preserved it intact. The advance guard of the revolutionary proletariat has adopted modern materialism—dialectical materialism and historical materialism—which constitute “the theoretical basis of communism, the theoretical foundations of the Marxist Party.”

But since historical materialism alone can constitute the scientific basis of political action, our Party alone bases its action on science. In our Party there can be no question of drafting a resolution on the basis of conciliation or a fusion of opinions of widely varied origins. The resolutions of our Party, being designed to guide its practice, are based on an analysis of the facts valued in the interest of the popular masses. This science, which is ours, is the fruit of a long evolution in which the philosophy of enlightenment formed one of the most decisive historical stages. That is why we are its heirs and its continuation.

We are this also because our Party alone takes up methodically that work which in the eighteenth century fell to the Encyclopædist. Our Party alone disseminates among the masses scientific enlightenment in economic, social, and political question. Elsewhere, almost without exception it is not a question of educating the masses, but of getting them to take, in the words of Descartes, “a little copper and glass for gold and diamonds.” And that in the best of cases.

But at the same time it is our Party alone which consistently defends science against obscurantism, and it is that which wins for it the sympathy of the best representatives of French science and literature. Elsewhere, abdication before the aggressor on the political plane is coupled with

abdication to obscuranist mysticism: the spirit of Munich with a Munich of its spirit.

The mysticism of cowardice and slavery exposes the decadence of a class that was once revolutionary. The Communist Party, the organized force of the vanguard, is the Party of *militant reason*. In this our Party maintains the highest tradition of French thought, that of the Encyclopædistes. Proving itself its true continuation, it will not cease to enrich it, or to keep it vital and dynamic.



THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE SCIENCES

By Marcel Prenant
Professor at the Sorbonne

THE French Revolution had a profound effect on everything human: this is especially true in the field of science. Not that, in fact, during the short revolutionary period there were made any numerous or particularly important scientific discoveries, but because the Revolution brought about, on the one hand, a reorganization of institutions for scientific research and learning, and on the other the linking of science with the needs of the nation. Thirdly, it effected the liberation of scientific thought.

The modern development of natural science had commenced three centuries earlier, simultaneously with the development of the manufacturing and commercial bourgeoisie. This succeeded a long torpor, which had lasted during the whole feudal period. The Arab doctors of the fifteenth century, although the best naturalists of their time, had nevertheless made little progress in their science beyond that which was known by the men of antiquity, and notably by Aristotle, eighteen centuries earlier.

In Christian countries the situation was still worse, because of the influence of the Church; even if the monks did play a great part in preserving the culture of antiquity, they enriched it by next to nothing. So far as there existed any progressive natural science, it was in the hands of the alchemists, who worked clandestinely, from fear of accusations of sorcery. Feudal society had no use for scholars.

From the end of the fifteenth century the position changed. The great voyages and the explorations of distant lands, which were to make the fortune of the bourgeoisie, demanded precise astronomical measurements, and gave rise to the manufacture of the first astronomical telescope. From the newly-discovered countries were brought quantities of exotic animals and plants unknown until then,

either as curiosities or in the hope of profit. On the other hand, telescope lenses differently placed furnished the first microscopes, which opened up to scientific investigation a whole field of minute living beings. In this way natural science made enormous progress in a short space of time. On the other hand, from the studies of the alchemists came processes which could be applied in the new industrial enterprises: for example, the amalgamation of gold by mercury which, utilized on a big scale in the sixteenth century in the Spanish-American colonies, made the wealth of the King of Spain.

In this way during the sixteenth century there arose the Renaissance scientific movement which later was carried to further lengths. The needs of the new sciences, and particularly of astronomy, led to the development of mathematics. The success of the positive sciences begot new methods of thought. In the following two hundred years, many famous names could be noted. Let us name almost at haphazard: Gutenberg and Rabelais, Galileo, Descartes, Pascal, Newton.

Physics as a real science dates from the seventeenth century. During this period, universities, museums zoologic, and botanic gardens were founded in a great number of towns in Europe. Societies were formed where scholars could meet and communicate their discoveries.

In the eighteenth century all this developed still further, when the bourgeoisie made its economic standpoint decisively dominant. Zoology and botany had made sufficient progress for a classification of living beings to be established, which is still the basis of our scientific knowledge. Chemistry, finally, also became a real science, freed from the confused notions of the alchemists. Large scientific syntheses were attempted. Buffon advanced for the first time, though very timidly, the hypothesis of the evolution of life-forms. The Encyclopædist sought to assemble all the knowledge then extant, and their success made possible the development of materialist philosophies.

A considerable public took note of all this: among the enlightened nobility and bourgeoisie, many people became passionately interested in physics or in natural science; they botanized, imitating Jean-Jacques Rousseau; or, again, they

followed fashionable courses of physics, like those where Abbe Nollet presented the experiments on electricity and other curious phenomena. The wealthy Farmer-General, Lavoisier, made an essential contribution to the foundation of modern chemistry.

As in political matters, a readjustment became necessary in the scientific field on the eve of the French Revolution. The scientific institutions were insufficient for the new needs, and those which existed had obsolete characteristics, which hindered the development of the sciences, in the same way that the obsolete nature of the political institutions hindered economic development.

There existed, for example, in Paris a foundation called the *Jardin du Roi* (King's Garden), instituted under Louis XIII, where curious plants and animals brought from far-away lands were kept alive. Attached to the *Jardin* was what was called the Cabinet of Natural History of the King, where specimens received from various countries were kept and classified. Attached to this Cabinet were some good naturalists; but they were far too few in number for the ever-increasing tasks which faced them. Moreover, the direction of the *Jardin* was entrusted to an *intendant* appointed by the King—naturally chosen from among the courtiers. It could happen that the *intendant* was a good naturalist; this was the case once for a long time with the Count de Buffon. But Buffon resigned in 1771, and the post had fallen successively into the hands of two incapable ignoramuses, the Count d'Angivilliers and the Count de la Billarderie. The result was that the *Jardin* and the Cabinet were led along a false path: there was less pre-occupation with teaching facts than with offering an agreeable spectacle for the idle strollers of high society. For example, there was no hesitation in touching up specimens to make them more attractive to the eye.

The naturalists of the *Jardin* resented this; but it was not till 1789 that they were able to express themselves and in their small field start the revolutionary action which was to lead to the transformation of the *Jardin* into a National Museum of Natural History. The occasion was a veritable provocation, which drove them to defend the livelihood of two of their number. In July, 1789, the Committee of Finance of the *States-General*, charged with making economies, set

about "axing." Examining the finances of the *Jardin du Roi*, they proposed to suppress two of the already insufficient naturalists' posts; one of the posts threatened was held by the celebrated Lamarck, who later became one of the founders of the theory of evolution. Those concerned protested to the National Assembly, suggesting that it would be better to suppress the absolutely useless post of the *intendant*, which, as the *intendant* received 8,000 *livres* per year, would be a much greater economy.

Arising from this, the naturalists of the *Jardins* requested permission to present to the Assembly a plan of necessary reforms for their establishment. They met on August 25th, 1789, to draw up this plan and, though the *intendant* who represented the King was present, they elected their own President from amongst themselves, the able zoologist, Daubenton. At their second meeting, the *intendant*, la Billarderie, no longer dared speak. From the third meeting onwards, he no longer dared to attend. The naturalists amongst themselves drew up a plan which they sent to the authorities, but which was forgotten for some time. It was the Convention in June, 1793, which passed a decree to implement it. In the National Museum of Natural History then created there was no *intendant* appointed: the inequalities which had existed among the naturalists of the *Jardin* were suppressed, and all were professors on the same footing; they recruited themselves by election and elected their director from amongst themselves. Education had been trebled, since to the three courses on chemistry, botany and anatomy, which existed before 1789, seven others had been added, mainly zoology, comparative anatomy, mineralogy, geology. The Museum was no longer simply a promenade for the idle, but a real scientific establishment. Collaborating with the work of education of the people, to which the Convention attached so much importance, it was further charged with preparing collections on natural history for the central schools of the *departments*, which had just been established, and which were the origin of our *lycees*.

As can be seen, the reform which gave rise to our Museum was brought about by the Convention, as a result of a small but truly revolutionary action alongside the great one, carried on from 1789 by the naturalists of the *Jardin*

against the power of the royal *intendant*. It was of considerable benefit to the natural sciences, which, however, does not prevent the systematic traducers of the Revolution, on this question as on others, from continually making use of slander; in *l'Histoire de la Nation Française* of Hanotaux, Professor Caulcier does not fear to write that the Revolution had "all but" destroyed the natural sciences. As has just been seen, it rendered to them the greatest of services.

The same author also reproached the Revolution with having suppressed the Academy of Science, another institution of the old regime, founded by Colbert in 1666. It is true that on August 8th, 1793, the Convention adopted a decree dissolving all academies, literary, or scientific societies and appropriate their libraries and collections as public property. Yet it must be admitted that this measure was largely justified by the past and the organization of the Academy of Science. Far from having equal rights, its members were divided into different categories, some of whom had not the right to speak. The first category under the old regime was made up of incompetent aristocrats and courtiers appointed by the King, and the alone could be Presidents or Vice-presidents. The Revolution suppressed the Academy and acted wisely. Moreover, from 1795 was reconstituted what it still known to-day as *l'Institut de France*, with an Academy of Science established on a new and healthy basis.

But the previous scientific cadres no longer sufficed for the needs of the new regime struggling for its existence and confronted by all sorts of problems. For military needs, saltpetre was necessary; there was need of new methods of casting cannon and other arms; there was the need to perfect technical inventions which were effectively applied for the first time such as military aerostatics and telegraphic optics thought out by Chappe. The needs of commerce demanded the unification of weights and measures; from which came the generalization of the decimal system and the creation of the metric system. But the definition of the metre in its relationship to the dimensions of the globe demanded new astronomical measurements. From these new problems, and many more, arose a whole series of further researches. We deal here only with that connected with the unification of weights and measures.

This unification was demanded in 1789 by many of the *Cahiers de Doleance*, as the units of measurement varied from one province to another, and, moreover, the sub-divisions of the different units were not decimal, thereby making calculations very complicated. Consequently, there were many errors and much loss of time in commerce. In 1790 already the Constituent Assembly adopted a proposal of unification. But the desire not to limit the reform to the French frontier (that same aspiration towards universality expressed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man) impelled the choice of units of measurement which were equally valid for all men. A commission was set up composed of the great scholars Borda, Lagrange, Laplace, Monge and Condorcet, which chose as the fundamental unit the *metre*, defined as "one ten-millionth part of the quarter of the earth's meridian." The law of March 30th, 1791 prescribed the necessary astronomical operations, in particular the determination of the difference in latitude between Dunkirk and Barcelona, which the astronomers Delambre and Mechain carried out between 1792 and 1799. Without awaiting the termination of these experiments, all the units of the metric system were defined by the law of the 18th Germinal of the Year III, and the physicist Lefevre-Gineau determined the relation of the kilogramme to the varying weights then in use. When this work was achieved, the *Directoire* was in a position to invite all civilized countries to participate in the definite establishment of the system. From the outset, Spain, Denmark, Sardinia, Tuscany, and the sister republics of Italy adhered to it. As is known, nearly all the countries of the world have adopted the metric system as the most convenient, and have in this way fulfilled the desire of the revolutionaries to work for all peoples.

All this shows the interest of science in public welfare. Bourgeois industrial development demanded technicians. It was in this that in 1794 were created, on the one hand, the Central School of Public Works, which later was to be called *Ecole Polytechnique* (Polytechnic School), and from which have graduated a great number of eminent scholars, officers, and engineers, and, on the other hand, the Conservatory of Arts and Crafts.

The original collection of machines and looms of the latter was a collection which the well-known inventor Vaucanson had left to the Royal Government. Increased by certain new specimens, it was handed to the Conservatory of Arts and Crafts by the decree of the Convention, which established it on 19th Vendemiaire of the Year III. According to the provisions of the decree, original instruments and machines useful to the arts and craft. In accordance with this, three demonstrators and one designer were attached to the Conservatory, and a small school of practical mechanics was annexed to it. The direct interest which this creation had for the bourgeoisie in power and for the nascent proletariat can easily be seen.

Let us limit ourselves to enumerating further the setting up of certain establishments, totally or partially scientific: the Bureau of Longitudes, the *Bibliotheque Nationale* (National Library), the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*,¹ and several medical schools. It should be noted that the desire to develop scientific teaching also affected the organization of secondary education. In the Central Schools of the *departments*, a greater place was given to the applied sciences, than in the curriculum of the colleges of the old regime, while, on the other hand, less importance was given to Latin and Greek. We have already seen how the Museum was collaborating in this concrete scientific education by the request that it should prepare collections for the Central Schools. After all that, the enemies of the Revolution still slander it by seeking to show that it declared that "it had no use for scholars." The Republic needed scholars because the bourgeoisie which led it needed them; and it proved it.

Let it not be forgotten that at the time of the most important scientific foundations the Revolution was in a terrible position, having to fight a foreign war against a coalition; at the same time having in its back the knife of the insurrections of Vendée and of the Girondins. But the Convention, led by the Montagnards, remained cool enough to found new seats of learning and pay attention to collections and libraries. It is only too evidently true that popular power, even when threatened by force, did not lose from

1 Higher school or college, of which no parallel exists in this country.

view the interests of science and education. It is an example which, nearer our time, was renewed by the Commune of 1871, Soviet power in 1918, and the Spanish Republican Government during its three years of struggle.

Further, to attack the Revolution, its enemies often accuse it of having guillotined the great chemist Lavoisier. It is true that this was probably a loss to science. But it must not be forgotten that Lavoisier, more than being a chemist, was a Farmer-General of the royalty—that is to say that he had pitilessly crushed the people. On the other hand, many men of great scientific value were placed in important positions: the mathematician Monge was made a Minister; the chemists Fourcroy and Guyton de Moreveau were members of the Convention; first-class scholars like Lagrange, Berthollet, Vauquelin, Hauy, Jussieu, Brongniart, Lacepede, and many others loyally served the Republic. At the age of twenty, the anatomist Bichat was appointed Professor at the School of Medicine of Paris by the Convention; and this choice was so happy that Bichat, although he died very young, was able to found or entirely remodel several sciences.

We mention separately three great naturalists: Lamarck, Cuvier, and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. We have seen that the first in 1789 occupied a minor post in the *Jardin du Roi* and that his livelihood itself was threatened. It was the Revolution which made him a Professor of the Museum and gave him the material means to enable him to carry out his work of genius. As for Cuvier and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, who were his juniors by many years, they were called upon very young by the Convention to occupy Chairs at the Museum. These three naturalists were to dominate scientifically the opening of the nineteenth century. When in the sole field of the study of life in the space of two years the revolutionary regime made professors of these three men and of Bichat, it can be said that it did work of great merit for biology.

It would be unjust to forget that if the Resolution wave to Lamarck and to Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire the material means later to expound evolutionist theories, it also gave them the moral means. Scientifically and objectively speaking, the theory of the evolution of living species, which we to-day consider as one of the greatest and most indestructible ac-

quisitions of human knowledge, was possible from the time, in the eighteenth century, when a sufficient inventory of animal and vegetable forms had been carried out. Buffon had then timidly outlined it, and Diderot had foreseen it. But it then appeared as too contradictory to the established order and to religious prejudice. Censured by the Faculty of Theology of the Sorbonne, Buffon had retracted. When Lamarck in 1809 again took up the same theory on a more solid scientific basis, he still met much social hostility and a certain incomprehension he could not overcome. At least, he did not find confronting him an official force which would have made him fear for his own personal security. It was because in the meantime the French Revolution had brought about a great advance in the freedom of thought.

The French Revolution was carried out under the sign of victorious Reason. It freed science from the obstacles placed in the way of it by a social system which it had outgrown, it united science and the nation in the same effort of liberation. To-day Fascist reaction puts in question, simultaneously and with equal violence, the value of science and the principles of 1789: sign of the weakness of a regime being superseded in its turn. As at the time of the great French Revolution, the alliance of science and the people will be triumphant over the obstacles of the past, together they will realize the dream of our great revolutionaries of a society based on human fraternity, on liberty, and on science.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE FINE ARTS

By Joseph Billiet

Assistant Curator of National Museums

THE demonstrations organized to celebrate, modestly, the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the French Revolution are not distinguished in their content from other historic commemorations. It is from artistic documents that we seek to evoke that period which as Goethe said opened "a new epoch in the history of the world."

These artistic documents, the products of first-class work presented in monographs and foundations, most of them still in existence, are, however, forgotten or unknown to most historians of arts. That the artists of the revolutionary era were all born either before or after the Revolution is made an excuse for classifying them solely according to dates, as either "eighteenth or nineteenth century." And since, on the other hand, no historian of art has undertaken to link these artistic phenomena with the totality of their determining economic and historical conditions, some of the most fruitful years there have ever been for the orientation of artistic evolution are passed over in silence.

This way the reasons underlying the transformations, not only in the inspiration of the artists of the nineteenth century and in the treatment they received in the altered society, but also of their technique, are all deliberately ignored. It must be recognized, however, that many erroneous and summary judgments have had to be revised, and, despite the blasphemers and the forgers, the significance of the French Revolution in what was produced and for the development of the fine arts is implicitly admitted.

The Position of the Fine Arts before the Revolution

Right up to the years which preceded and prepared the Revolution French society, represented by those who commissioned art-work or made use of it—that is to say, the royalty, the nobility, and a few big bourgeois—only considered art as a sign of its power, an accessory to its comfort, or a means of pleasure; the artists being their servants, less intimate and less influential than their valets.

Furthermore, to acquire any reputation and obtain good orders, it was necessary to belong to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture or to the Academy of Architecture. Entry into these official corporations could only be obtained after studying under masters anxious before all else of conserving, with their own privileges, their authority, and their fame. It demanded a certain submission, which was opposed to the sincere evolution of individual qualities.

This social subordination and the more or less humiliating conditions of admission to mastery and the right to live thereby was accompanied, nearly always as far as the artists were concerned, with a lack of culture which was detrimental to the expansion of their art, and closed all outlets to them other than those of their speciality as artisans. Another tyranny which dogged them was that of fashion. Before the Revolution the only *Salon* which enable artists to exhibit their work with success was that of the *Messieurs de l'Academie Royale*. To the artists not members of the Academy, there was open, however, the exhibition of the Academy of Saint-Luc and that of the *Jeunesse* (Youth). But with that of Saint-Luc it was still necessary to be an associate member, and thus part of the corporation. Naturally the customers went to those who already had a name, and high charges, and who maintained the one by ameliorating the other, who avoided all novelty, research outside the way through which they had obtained the one and the other. From this without doubt arises the dry monotony of most of the artists of the eighteenth century, flattering portraitists, smutty illustrators, and decorators of transoms, clever and indefatigable exploiters of the style in which they shone, and of which the hollow facility to-day disconcerts us.

Prior to the Revolution and the creation of museums, they could learn their craft only in the studios of their masters, or know the work of others than their masters except that of a very few past and foreign artists which they might see at some collector's. It needed the Revolution to assemble the treasures appropriated from the royal collections, the churches, the monasteries, and from rich individuals, before the eyes of artists were opened to the immense possibilities of a direct education, rich in all human experience.

The influence of the philosophers and the Encyclopædistes morally improved the social position of artists. They received a consideration and a respect to which the esteem shown by the writers and the vogue of æsthetic theories contributed.

These æsthetic theories, resulting from archaeological discoveries made, first in Rome, then in Greece, developed in the midst of contradictions which reflected the disequilibrium of society. At least in opposing the accepted taste of the eighteenth century they implicitly condemned this disequilibrium and sought to remedy it by ideological contrivances, which were necessarily ineffective.

Vain though they may appear to us to-day, these theories of a return to antiquity with their naturalist antitheses inspired by archaeologists such as Caylus and Winckelmann, philologists like Gessner, or metaphysicians such as Kant, elaborated by æsthetes such as Quatremere de Quincy or Emeric David, their abundance and their conflicts and significant, in the same way as those that arose around the ideas of the Encyclopædistes, in the attempt to explain in accordance with the laws of Nature those of mankind's organized grouping and of wealth-production. They show what attention pre-revolutionary society—already favourable in principle to the liberation of the artist—gave to artistic questions, and in particular to the relation of art to society, to the educational role of art, and its civilizing power.

But the Revolution alone could bring about the liberation of the artists and spread artistic sentiment amongst the masses; it alone could enrich information and develop the sensitivity, the intelligence and the consciousness of artists—renewing thereby those forces of human transformation and

self-expression which characterize the prodigious evolution of art of the nineteen century.

The Art Institutes of the Revolution

The concept, still vague but generous, of the relation of art to society and of the role of art in the organization of cultural life—a conception which saw the light of day in so many writings of the pre-revolutionary epoch—was not forgotten by those who had the heavy task of substituting for the pre-revolutionary epoch—was not forgotten by those who had the heavy task of substituting for the putrified apparatus of the old regime the new framework of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.

The Constituent was the first to appoint, in December, 1790, an art commission responsible for the conservation of works of art. It was attached to the committee charged with alienating the property of the clergy. By its decree of August 21st, 1791, suppressing the privileges of the Royal Academy, it opened to all artists, French and foreign, the right to exhibit in the *Salon*. Finally, it also decided to complete the Church of Saint-Genevieve and to transform it into a national *Pantheon*.

The Legislative took action only to conserve monuments threatened with destruction by neglect or from the vandalism of speculators.

But the main work of encouraging artists and forming public taste was accomplished by the Convention. This consisted essentially in the creation of museums and the organization of artistic education.

True, the idea of making the masterpieces of the past available to the public had been put forward as early as the middle of the eighteenth century. It was formulated in the *Encyclopædia*. Yet neither Lenormant de Tournehem's attempt in 1750 nor that of d'Angiviller in 1775 was successful. The decree of July 26th, 1791, by which the Constituent ordered the collection in the Louvre and the Tuilleries of "monuments of science and of art," prepared the way for that of the Convention of September 27th, 1792, ordering the conversion of the Louvre into a museum. This was opened to the public on 28th Brumaire or the Year II (November 18th, 1793).

The first "Louvre" was far from perfect. Many works were missing, dispersed in the royal chateaux. Moreover, the space available unencumbered by parasite survivors of the Court was quite inadequate. Not till 1794 was it able to spread into the quarters previously occupied by the old Academy, at last expelled. In Floreal of the Year III it occupied the *Salon Carré*, the Garden of the *Infante*, the Gallery Apollon, the Gallery of Antiques, and the big gallery by the water.

Its first administration was a "Commission of the Museum," on which were well-known painters like Vincent and Regnault. This, from 27th Nivose of the Year II, was replaced by a "Conservatory of the Museum," the presidency of which was entrusted to Fragonard, on the proposal of Louis David, who was its real animator. The conservators lacked a true understanding of what was the true function of a museum. Moreover, being artists themselves, they often tended to be prejudiced. Nevertheless, the results of the creation of the Museum were considerable both for the formation of the taste of the public and for the education of artists.

In the Year V the Louvre became the "Central Museum of Art," and the Convention also created the Gallery of the Luxembourg and, in Versailles, the Special Museum of the French School.

The idea of bringing together in a national storehouse the masterpieces of French art goes back to the time of Alexandre Lenoir, conservator of one of the depots in which art treasures taken from the churches and from individuals are assembled. As early as 1790 he had gathered together in the former convent of Queen Marguerite the element of that Museum of Monuments which the Convention established by the decree of October 18th, 1792. From the Year IV the "Museum of Antiques and French Monuments" contrived, through the efforts of its conservator, and despite the calls made upon it for the Central Museum (the Louvre), the Pantheon, and Saint-Denis, ceaselessly to enrich itself until in 1811 it possessed more than 500 monuments classified in chronological order.

If we add to these central institutions the creation of the *musees d'arrondissements* (constituency museums) decreed on January 21st, 1794, one understands the broad scope of this effort at artistic revelation. Toulouse had the first of these museums: established by the decree of December 12th, 1793, the "Museum of the *Midi* of the Republic" was opened in August, 1795. This decree was implemented by a consular regulation of 14th Fructidor of the Year VIII, which created fifteen collections of paintings at Lille, Nancy, Strasbourg, Dijon, Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Nantes, Rouen, Caen, Rennes, Brussels, Mayence, and Geneva. Grenoble and Montpellier were added later. All these museums were from the start enriched from the State depots.

From the point of view of artistic education, the achievements of the Revolution were conservative and democratic. While suppressing the Academies, it maintained at the same time the principle of specialized teaching which had characterized them. But it developed education in **design amongst** broader social classes by including it in the curriculum of central schools, and in particular the Central School of Public Works, which included the teaching of architecture. Public art schools, the Special School of Painting and Sculpture, the Special School of Architecture replaced the Academies. Private schools remained and others were started; evening classes were organized.

Finally the great interest of the State in artistic organizations manifested itself by the creation in July, 1793, of the *Communes des Arts*, founded by David. It did not include any privileged artists. Repealed by the Convention, the Commune was replaced, on 1st Ventose of the Year III, by the Popular and Republican Society of Arsts founded by the engraver Sergent. Then on the 11th of the same month the members of the National Jury formed the Revolutionary Arts Club. These societies, which met at the Louvre, exercised a great influence, because they were supported both by the State and by the authority of certain of their members such as David, Sergent, Wicar, Chaudet, Prud'hon, Gerard, Tapino-Lebrun, Islabey, etc.

Ultimately, on 5th Fructidor of the Year III, the previous decision of the Convention to create a "society dedicated to the advancement of the sciences and the arts" was sanctioned in a law, later completed, which created the *National Institute*, the section of Fine Arts being included with that of Literature.

The functioning of these various bodies was controlled by the Committee for Public Education, which supervised their administration until September, 1795. Among its members were David, Guyton-Morveau, Thomas Lindet, Gregoire, Mathieu, Lakanal, Cllotz. This Committee was at all times supported by the Convention, the Committee of Public Safety, and the Commune of Paris, whose, solicitude showed itself in the most technical details.

"One remains smitten with admiration," declared F. Benoit, "before the marvellous activity developed in all directions and on the most varied questions by the revolutionary Government. It is known that on the morrow of Thermidor a party came together . . . which sought to present the Montagnards as men who said: 'Let us destroy the scholars, blot out light . . . make the arts disappear'. It is only necessary to confront the accusation with the facts to appreciate its true value."

Did not Mathieu, on the contrary, proclaim that the arts, the sciences and philosophy were "the creditors of the Revolution, for which the Revolution must do all in its power?"

This noble principle which corresponds to the understanding of the role of the arts in the daily construction of civilization animated the whole illuminating experiments made by the Revolution in the artistic field. These innovations, it must be stated, gave a basis for much that was revived by successive governments, who took all the credit to themselves. Napoleon, in particular, was often, in this field as in others, the usurper of achievements and discoveries made by the Revolution.

The Revolution and the Artists

The names we have cited make it easy to appreciate what a welcome was given to the Revolution by the majority

stood clearly what an advance was given to their condition by the proclamation of the Rights of Man. But they had other proofs of the solicitude of the revolutionary Government. Financial recompense was made to those whose work was accepted for the *Salon*. In Floreal of the Year II a big competition resulted in the distribution of 442,800 *livres*.

But it was not only from personal or class interest that most of the artists gave their support to the new order. For these men, animated in the practice of art itself with a fine sensibility and a widened comprehension of men, the Revolution brought another liberty than that of living conditions. It opened new perspectives beyond those of commissions and prizes.

The great movement which in the middle of the eighteenth century had brought men like Vien and especially David into opposition to the easy æsthetics of the boudoirs, in which the followers of success were enmeshed—a movement which Fragonard himself did not escape. This movement, born of an admiring veneration for antiquity, ran the risk of becoming crystallized fatally into sterile and lifeless imitations. The Revolution brought to it the force of a veritable renaissance.

To these men, fired with heroism, vibrating with ambitions for great achievements, it brought the greatest of subjects which really living artists could desire: the liberation of man—in countenance, gestures, and demeanour—from fashions and allegories which basely disguised their servitude. They offered the most vast of themes: the illustration of a new human order. Moreover, despite outwardly misleading appearances and artificial divisions maintained by defective instruction, there can be found in the art of the revolutionary period all the germs of the great upsurge of the nineteenth century.

Considering the artists before all else as men, let us note briefly the principal reactions produced in artists by the great events and principal actors of the Revolution.

True, there were amongst them those who rebelled. emigrants, Danloux, Paris, Menageot, Mme. Vigee-Lebrun. But Vien, David, Isabey, Gerard, Regnault, and those who, through their technique displayed less vigour, were before all else painters, Greuze, Fragonard, Hubert Robert, and Prud'hon, gave their support freely.

None, however, identified themselves with the Revolution to the same degree as did Louis David. Born in 1748, David was forty-eight at the time of the first revolutionary murmurings. This admirer of the antiquity in which he found sources of virile inspiration found in the Revolution a subject worthy of his genius. The *Serment du Jeu de Paume*, *La Mort du Jeune Bara*, the portraits of Lepelletier de Saint-Fargeau, of the member of the Convention, Gerard with his family, of Milhaud, and especially of Marat assassinated, showed a dialectic alliance of the profoundest of revolution of antiquity with a similar appreciation of revolutionary reality. But David was also an indefatigable organizer of great revolutionary celebrations: the triumph of Voltaire, the commemoration of the taking of Toulon, those of the deaths of Viala and of Bara. After having rallied to the Empire, he died in exile in Brussels in 1825.

Prud'hon (1758-1825), David's junior by ten years, was one of the most authentic of forerunners of pictorial romanticism. He painted with enthusiastic affection the portrait of Saint-Just and gave it to him. He fled after Thermidor and for a time made a living by drawing vignettes for almanacks. He came back into favour in 1799.

The role of Fragonard during the Revolution was a minor one. Born in 1732, he virtually ceased painting in 1794; but he participated in the sittings of the National Jury and presided over the Committee of Arts.

Greuze, friend of Diderot, was already an old man (1725-1806). He greeted the Revolution with enthusiasm, since it avenged him for his treatment by the Royal Academy. He painted portraits of Condorcet, of Dumouriez, of Robespierre, and of Theroigne de Mericourt.

Other artists who developed during the eighteenth century were portraitists of the personalities of the Revolution or decorators of its pageants: Dureux (1733-96), Boze, Colson Senior (1733-1803), Robert Lefevre (1756-1830), and Hennequin (1763-1833), who was, moreover, a thorough Jacobin. Others occupied positions on the committees of the museums or the schools, such Duplessis (1725-1802), Hubert Robert (1733-1808), Moreau (1741)-1814) Vincent (1746-1816), Lagrenée Junior (1740-1821), Gamelin (Gamelin (1735-1803).

Others, whilst not devoting their art to the events or the

men, nevertheless executed their work in the midst of public fervour, or had their careers facilitated by the encouragement given to art by the revolutionary government. Regnault (1754-1829), Isabey (1767-1855), Gerard (1770-1837), Gros (1771-1835), Swedbach (1769-1823) are those who owe their formation to this great epoch and to the tendencies which it brought with it. Boilly (1771-1823) won a precocious notoriety by painting, with more diligence than communicative emotion, the *Triomphe de Marat*.

Portraits and scenes were popularized by a great number of engravers, such as Monet, Alix, Levachez, Descourtis, Allais, Coqueret, Coppia, and Debucourt.

The sculptors who played a role in the revolutionary period or were inspired by it are less numerous than painters. Chaudet (1763-1810), Bosio (1768-1846) were mainly men of the Empire. But Pajou (1730-1809) and Chinard (1756-1813) were men of the Revolution. Houdon (1741-1828), one of the greatest sculptors of all times, carved effigies of philosophers, Encyclopædists, and active personalities of the revolutionary period, work of unequalled intensity.

The revolutionary period, properly speaking, did not have much time or leisure in which to build. The architects, formed for the most part in the study of antique society, made a few attempts to use classic formulae at the end of the eighteenth century. But the insufficiency of their means and the modifications introduced into technique by the new use of metal frame work prevented architecture from finding a national style corresponding to the forward surge of a new social class. Brought back to the service of glory, of a master and the cult of memories, architecture remained at the beginning of the nineteenth century coldly archaeological.

Conclusion

It is not possible to extend further this account, which is rendered monotonous by dry brevity.

It would be necessary to penetrate further into the life of the arts during the revolutionary period to appreciate, in terms of their enduring human qualities, the active ferment brought about by the Revolution in this field—which remains by far too little known.

The raising of the social level of artists, the creation of museums, the development and democratization of education, the freedom to exhibit, every kind of encouragement, have powerfully transformed the conditions of life of the artist, redirected artistic preoccupations and made possible the technical research which enriched the nineteenth century. Moreover, public taste, adapted to new economic conditions, found in the revelations of the museums the means towards a richer culture.

The effects of the Revolution on the evolution of the arts were therefore far from being as negligible as might be thought from the interested silence of too many historians. On the contrary, they were important; and were all the more meritorious since the Revolution had neither the time nor the facilities for developing them. They were lasting, too, like all the revolutionary institutions which reveal once again their worth as soon as purifying hands disengaged them of the bounds imposed upon them by the capitalist system, which nonetheless has not been able to destroy them.

At a time when the Fascist regimes, these diseases of capitalist degeneration, are exiling artists and destroying works of art, it is our duty to meditate on the great examples of culture and civilizing fervour which our ancestors of culture and civilizing fervour which our ancestors of 1789 and 1793 have left us. The Communist Party, the authorized continuator of the work of the first French revolutionaries, also gives to art the eminence it should hold in the eyes of the working class as means to the equilibrium of Socialist society.

CALENDAR OF DATES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

July 21st, 1788: Meeting of the States of Dauphine at the Chateau of Vizille.

August 8th, 1788: The King decides on the calling of the States-General.

May 5th, 1789: Meeting of the States-General in Versailles

June 17th, 1789: The *Tiers-Etat* proclaim the transforming of the States-General into a National Assembly which declared itself the Constituent Assembly on July 9th.

June 20th, 1789: *Oath of the Jeu de Paume* (Tennis Court).

June 23rd, 1789: Refusal of the *Tiers-Etat* and part of the deputies of the clergy to obey the order of the King to leave the Assembly Chamber of the States-General.

July 14th, 1789: Fall of the Bastille.

August 4th, 1789: Abolition of feudal rights.

August 26th, 1789: Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.

October 5th and 6th, 1789: The women of Paris go to Versailles and bring back the King and royal family.

July 14th, 1790: Celebration of National Federation at Champ de Mars.

June 14th, 1791: Law Le Chapelier forbidding workers the rights of coalition and association.

June 20th, 1791: Flight of the King, arrested at Varennes.

July 17th, 1791: Shooting of the Champ de Mars. On the order of the Constituent the National Guard fired on demonstrators demanding the deposing of the King.

April 20th, 1792: Declaration of war on Austria.

July 11th, 1792: The *Patrie* (Nation) declared in danger.

July 25th, 1792: Manifesto of Marshal Brunswick, commander-in-chief of the counter-revolutionary armies, insulting the French people.

August 10th, 1792: The people of Paris occupy the Tuilleries and demand the arrest of Louis XVI and the election of a Convention by universal suffrage.

September 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th, 1792: Execution of suspects, of the enemies of the people in the country.

September 2nd, 1792: Victory of Valmy.

September 21st, 1792: Proclamation of the Republic by the Convention at its first sitting.

January 21st, 1793: Execution of Louis XVI

May 31st—June 2nd, 1793: The people of Paris obtain from the Convention the arrest of Girondin leaders and bring the Jacobins to power.

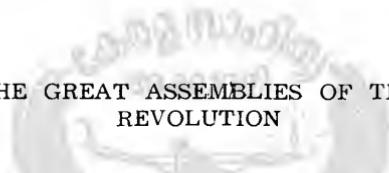
July 10th, 1793: Appointment of the Great Committee of Public Safety of the Year II.

July 13th, 1793: Assassination of Marat by charlotte corday.

November 24th, 1793: Introduction of the Republican Calendar by the Convention.

April 5th, 1794: Sentence of death passed on Danton.

July 27th (Thermidor 9th), 1794: Arrest of Robespierre, Couthou and Saint-Just.



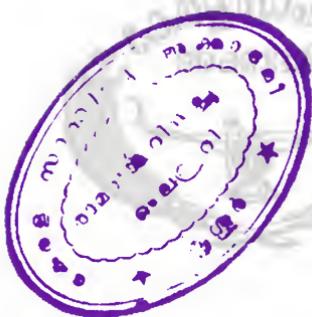
THE GREAT ASSEMBLIES OF THE REVOLUTION

The States-General: May 5th, 1789—June 17th, 1789.

The Constituent: June 17th, 1789—October 1st, 1791.

The Legislative: October 1st, 1791—September 21st, 1792.

The Convention: September 21st, 1792—October 26th, 1795



ANOTHER'S HARVEST

by Alec Johnson

The masses of the common people of India are village people, peasants living from their labour on the land. Yet, at a time when there is so much in the air about freedom for India and when so many are seeking a solution to her problems what is known of these common people of the villages? What of their problems and their struggle against oppression? What does freedom mean to them? Amongst the common people in the villages, what basis is there for Hindu-Muslim difference if indeed real differences exist at all? What support do the peasants give to the claims of the Congress that it represents all sections of the people, irrespective of status or religion? What of the Muslim League which is demanding Bengal as part of Pakistan, a Muslim homeland to be divided from Hindu India? How far is Kisan Sabha a real force in the villages and what is its policy?

It was with such questions in mind that this British journalist trekked through Bengal's villages and towns. The answers that he sets down in his delightfully simple style show that the man abroad has sure eyes and a sound heart. He has brought to his subject the freshness of a real observer. He has nothing of that superficiality which characterises the work of such observers as have tried to be impartial in their hunt for objects.

Lavishly illustrated with the author's own sketches, maps and diagrams.